

# Quintessence of Religious Doctrines

## *(Mathopadesa Sarangal)*

*The True Faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church with Biblical References*

**Mor Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril**

*Translation & Commentary*

**Prof. O. M. Mathew Oruvattithara**



وَمُحَمَّدٌ رَافِقُهُ فِي حَقِّهِمْ وَحَقِّ صَدْرِهِ

Beth Hardsutho Library

[illegible]

Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.



# Quintessence of Religious Doctrines (*Mathopadesa Sarangal*)

*The True Faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church  
with Biblical References*

Mor Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril

*English Translation & Commentary*

Prof. O. M. Mathew Oruvattithara



*Publishers*

Mor Adai Study Centre, Changanacherry, 686 106  
&  
SOCMNet.org

## **Quintessence of Religious Doctrines**

*(Mathopadesa Sarangal)*

The True Faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church with Biblical References

**Mor Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril**

English Translation and Commentary (based on 1908 edn.):

**Prof. O. M. Mathew Oruvattithara**

Padinjattumbagham, Ammencherry,

Gandhi Nagar P.O, Kottayam - 36

Tel: 0481-6530180

Publishers : **Mor Adai Study Centre & SOCMNet.org**

Cheeranchira, Changanacherry 686 106

Tel: 0481-2724353. moolelachen@yahoo.com

Typesetting : Adorn Graphics, Kottayam. adorn@rediffmail.com

Cover : Aji Kottayam

Printed at : Dona Printers, Kottayam. Tel: 0481-2562008

First Edition : December 2006

Price : Rs. 110/-



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Purport</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. Publishers' Brief	5
2. Foreword	11
3. Introduction	13
4. Translator's Note	15
5. Evaluation of the Book	17
6. Abbreviations used	18
7. Preface	21
8. List of Topics Analysed	
Theme 1 - On the Blessed Trinity	23
Theme 2 - On God the Father	29
Theme 3 - On the Son	30
Theme 4 - On the Holy Spirit	38
Theme 5 - On the Holy Sacraments	40
Theme 6 - On the Holy Baptism	45
Theme 7 - On the Holy Eucharist	52
Theme 8 - On the Holy Confession	61
Theme 9 - On the Holy Oil	68
Theme 10 - On the Holy Orders	70
Theme 11 - On the Holy Matrimony	76
Theme 12 - On the Anointing of the Sick	80
Theme 13 - On Burial	82
Theme 14 - On Prayer	84

Theme 15	- On Fasts	88
Theme 16	- On Sundays and Feasts or Obligatory Days	92
Theme 17	- On the Feast of the Saints	94
Theme 18	- On the Mother of God	96
Theme 19	- On the Prayer to the Saints	100
Theme 20	- On the Prayer for the Departed	108
Theme 21	- On Fasting and Eucharistic Celebration etc. for the Dead	116
Theme 22	- On the Relics of Saints	119
Theme 23	- On Signing oneself with the mark of the Cross and the Veneration of the Cross	121
Theme 24	- On Chastity	126
Theme 25	- On the Matrimony of the Clergy	128
Theme 26	- On Human Soul	130
Theme 27	- On Sin	132
Theme 28	- On Repentance	138
Theme 29	- On Justification	141
Theme 30	- On Salvation and Punishment	143
Theme 31	- On Resurrection	147
Theme 32	- On Independent Creation, Free Will and Pre-Determination	149
Theme 33	- On the Books of the Bible	156
Theme 34	- On Synods and the Magisterium of the Church	159
Appendix	- Names of Heresies etc.	163

## *Publishers' Brief*

Through the centuries, the Syriac Church Fathers have expounded the faith of the Church in their homilies and writings. Syriac literature is very rich with their contributions. But very little has been done to translate and interpret their writings into modern languages for the use of the faithful. The vast majority of these Syriac texts still exist in the manuscript form, although a few of them have appeared in print. The late Archbishop of blessed memory H.E. Mor Julius Çiçek of Holland reprinted some works of the famous Syriac Father Maphryono Mor Gregorios Bar Ebroyo. But in the Indian branch of the Syrian Church very little has been ever written or even translated.

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a period of resurgence and renaissance in the Malankara Syrian Church. The litigations and rift prompted by the reformist group, inspired by the Protestants, challenged the orthodoxy of the Church through their speeches and pamphlets. A very strong initiative was taken by the then leaders of our Church to defend the faith, history and doctrines of the Church. Mr. E.M. Philip Edavazhikal, Kottayam, the secretary of the Church at the time, was the leader and pioneer in countering the influence of the reformists. His great contribution to the field of Church History in the form of the book '*The Indian Church of St. Thomas*' remains an authoritative work. Another noteworthy publication of that time is the book titled '*Poorvika Pithakkanmarum Pothusunnahadosukalum*' written in Malayalam by Rev. Deacon Puthussery Joseph *Semmasan* (Father of the late H.B. Baselius Poulouse II, Catholicos of the East). Another book published during that period is the contribution of Rev. Deacon P.T. Geevarghese, who later became the first Archbishop, Mar Ivanios of the Malankara



Catholic Church, titled '*Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians?*'. Similarly, numerous articles published in the journals and periodicals of the Church also served to defend and define the faith of the Church. The most important among the catechetical contributions of those periods came from none other than the then Malankara Malpan Very Rev. Geevarghese Vattasseril.

Vattasseril Geevarghese Malpan and Konattu Mathen Malpan were the two luminaries of the above period. They were teachers at the Old Seminary, Kottayam. Konattu Malpan concentrated on the publication of Syriac books, magazines and liturgical texts for the Church at the Mor Julius Press, dedicated in his uncle's name. He took up the translation of the Syriac New Testament which was published by his son Abraham Malpan. He also took the initiative to compile and translate the one volume '*Prayer Book*' still used by the faithful. This was published with the blessings of the then Patriarch of Antioch & all the East H.H. Ignatius Abded Aloho II. Vattasseril Geevarghese Malpan taught seminarians at Parumala and Kottayam while Konattu Mathen Malpan taught at Kottayam and at Pampakuda. If these two luminaries were united in mind and action, the fate of the Malankara Church would have been much different.

Vattasseril Malpan wrote the book in Malayalam, titled '*Mathopadesa Sarangal*' for the study of the basic articles of faith of the Church. He covers many major themes related to the faith, doctrine, sacraments, canon of the Bible, synods, schisms, etc. He prepared these themes in a refined and condensed form so that the learners can memorize and have them engraved in their mind. Biblical illustrations add to the authenticity of the formulations. He compiled this, based on the works of the scholars of the Church like Mor Gregorios Bar Ebroyo. So this work is firmly based and rooted in the patristic heritage of the Church. The first edition of this book was published in 1900 with the imprimatur of the late lamented Mor Dionysius Joseph Pulikkottil II of blessed memory. The book was reprinted several times and the latest unadulterated edition was

published in 1964. Since then we have witnessed editions of this book with alterations prompted by ulterior motives. The changes are deplorable since the author himself never tried to change any of the formulations in his original work, even though his attitude to Church administration and allegiance to the hierarchy had changed in due course of time.

Malpan Geevarghese Vattasseril and Rabban Poulouse Kochuparampil were elected to the episcopate by the Malankara Church and they were sent to the Patriarch of Antioch, for their consecration. At that time there was a rift at the Patriarchate. The Patriarch Abdul Messiah was deposed in 1903 and a new Patriarch H.H. Ignatius Abded Aloho II (Abdulla) was enthroned in 1906 by the Holy Synod. The removal and installation were duly accepted and publicized officially in the Malankara Church. In 1908 the bishop designates from Malankara were sent to the canonical Patriarch H.H. Ignatius Abded Aloho, who was then at Jerusalem, for consecration. They were consecrated as Metropolitans and came back to India. An unhappy conflict erupted in Malankara after the arrival of the Patriarch H.H. Ignatius Abded Aloho in India in 1910 when Vattasseril Mor Dionysius took a stand of dissidence against the Patriarch, and his supporters propagated allegations that His Holiness was trying to capture the wealth of the Malankara Church. The co-trustees and all other Metropolitans sought to execute a bond of allegiance to the Patriarch of Antioch by the Metropolitans and the parishes in Malankara, so as to safeguard against any dissidence in the future. Unfortunately, Mor Dionysius took a stand against the co-trustees and the brother Metropolitans and even challenged the Patriarch. His Holiness was forced to excommunicate this dissident bishop in 1911. This dissidence and the resulting excommunication was the starting point of the ongoing feud and factionalism in the Malankara Church.

The strife and struggles continued in the Church; but in 1931 Mor Dionysius met His Holiness Ignatius Elias III during H.H.'s



visit to India and H.H lifted the excommunication through the encyclical No. 161. Mor Dionysius entered into eternal rest in 1934. The holy Church lost a great soul who had high intellectual potential and ability to interpret the doctrines and scriptures but unfortunately squandered much of his later years in strife. The unforgettable literary contribution of this great soul is the book '*Mathopadesa Sarangal*'. Here we have taken on the task of reprinting it so that the coming generations have access to a translation of the unaltered version of the original contribution of the then Malankara Malpan of the undivided Church.

The translation into English and the brief commentary added to each theme are the work of Prof. O.M. Mathew Oruvattithara, the retired Professor of Baselius College, Kottayam. He is an erudite scholar and studious researcher. He got enrolled for the Masters in Theology after his retirement from academic life. He successfully completed the Masters at the 'Mar Thoma Vidya Niketan,' affiliated with the Gregorian University in Rome and is now teaching Orthodox theology, by writing books, articles and teaching classes. His laudable contributions in the form of the translation and commentary of this book will always be remembered. We express our most sincere thanks and gratitude to Prof. O.M. Mathew. The English speaking members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Malankara will remain deeply indebted to him.

We were planning to publish this book through '*Mor Adai Study Centre*' with the generous support of '*SOCM Forum* <http://www.socmnet.org>'. Mr. Thomas Daniel (Reji), the Chief Moderator of the Forum, announced this project on the forum and the support from our well wishers was overwhelming. We were encouraged to publish a few thousand copies in English and also in Malayalam so that the senior Sunday School students and all the teachers can get a copy each at a very nominal price. We would like to acknowledge the generous support and patronage that we received from His Grace Mor Theethos Yeldo, Archbishop of the Malankara Diocese of US and Canada. Generous support also



came from the Youth Organization of the Archdiocese and the following persons.

1. Chev. Daniel K.J
2. Chev. Dr. Mathews Abraham
3. Chev. Thomas Abraham
4. Dr. Sinu John
5. Dr. Susan Jacob
6. Mr. Anup Kuruvilla Vazhayil
7. Mr. Babu Paul Maracheril
8. Mr. Binu Aramath
9. Mr. Paul Philip
10. Members of St. Mary's Jacobite Movement, Riyadh

We sincerely thank them all.

Mr. Justice K. T. Thomas, Former Judge, Supreme Court of India, is thanked most sincerely for authoring the foreword of this book, finding spare time to do so, amidst his multifarious activities in the social and academic fields.

Our gratitude towards Malankara Malpan Very Rev. Dr. Curian Corepiscopa, Kaniamparambil, the Priest trustee of the Syrian Jacobite Church, for having honoured us by his erudite introduction.

We are indebted to Dr. Sebastian Brock of the University of Oxford, England, who is one of the greatest living Syriac scholars, for his critical evaluation of this work.

We acknowledge with thanks the services of Dr. Thomas Joseph Thattunkal, Los Angeles, whom we consulted in the publication of the book and Mrs. Kumari Mathew Kallooparambil, Pallom, Kottayam, who prepared the emblem for the book.

We must also express our sincere thanks to Mr. Thomas Daniel (Reji), who encouraged the publication of the book by '*Mor Adai Study Centre*', contacting all the sponsors, publicizing the project and taking the advocacy role in between us and many who are related with this. Mr. John Philip Kottaparambil, webmaster of various *Malankara Syriac Orthodox* web sites is the motivating spirit behind this project. He located the right person in Prof. O.M. Mathew to take up this task and was the connecting link with the translator, desk top typist and all persons for revisions. He deserves a great applause and appreciation.

Services rendered by Mrs. Susan, Adorn Graphics, who typeset the text, Mr. Aji who designed the cover pages, and the Dona Printers, Kottayam, for printing the book, are hereby acknowledged.

We dedicate this book to the glory of God and for the edification of the Church at large.

In the service of our Lord,

**Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil**

*Executive Director,*

*Mor Adai Study Centre*

Chicago,  
Dec.15, 2006

## JUSTICE K. T. THOMAS

Former Judge, Supreme Court of India

Thadathil  
Muttambalam  
Kottayam - 686 004  
Kerala (India)

Tel: 0481-2578215  
Mobile: 09447078215

12-12-2006

### *Foreword*

Prof. O. M. Mathew and I were classmates. It started when we both joined the kindergarten school at Kottayam. His father and my father were friends. We were together in the same school till fourth class. Thereafter, we studied in different educational institutions, and even then we maintained our friendship, though only rarely we could meet each other. Prof. O. M. Mathew was then and now an intrepid. He out-shone himself among his classmates. I have observed him towing always differently from others. He surprised many of his Christian associates when he offered himself as a candidate on BJP ticket for contesting Parliament elections from Kottayam constituency. He did not mind his Christian companions frowning at him for associating himself with RSS. His activities in political field continued unabated even after he failed to win the Parliament election. Thus, Prof. O. M. Mathew was a different person at all times.

This book is the English version of a work authored by Mar Geevarghese Dionysius (popularly known as 'Vattasseril Thirumeni') who spearheaded the revolt in Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church. A perusal of this book reveals the strength of conviction of its author in the historical ordination emanating from Patriarch of Antioch. A considerable section of people belonging to the Malankara Church believe that Patriarch of Antioch is the successor of St. Peter and hence he is the repository of the authority to ordain clergymen and bishops. I learnt that Marthoma Metropolitan Titus the First



received his ordination from a Bishop who in turn had received ordination traced through the Patriarch of Antioch. I also learnt that a few committed clergymen had to undergo a lot of sufferings to bring down that Bishop who lived far away from the place selected for the elevation of Titus the First. Thus people ventured to undergo all the hardships and tribulations to secure the historical ordination traced through the Patriarch of Antioch.

As I have studied the subject I noticed that differences in dogmatics between Marthoma Church and Syrian Orthodox Church are more on academic nuances than real, or more on finer niceties than on fundamental principles. It cannot be overlooked that minor differences had existed even between two schools of thought of the same denomination. When all the denominations (barring Jehova's witnesses) stand by the creed enunciated in Nicean Synod, there are broader and larger areas of agreement while the areas of disagreement are only on fringe details rather than fundamentals.

I learnt that Prof. O. M. Mathew underwent a course of training in Theological subjects and that would have helped him to go into the fathoms of dogmatics of different denominations of Christian Church. I admire him for this endeavour. The translation work is done without impairing the spirit and substance of the original book.



**Justice K. T. Thomas**

## *Introduction*

While everything fears the all-devouring time, certain books and treatises transcend time by their inner strength. *Mathopadesa Sarangal* authored by the late Mor Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril, while he was the Malankara Malpan of the undivided Syrian Orthodox Church is one such book. For, despite the passing of more than a century since it was published first, this work is still authentic and authoritative as regards the tenets and theology of the Mother Church.

Written when the want of a catechetical kind of work was deeply felt, this book appeared and it did delineate the teachings and preachings of the Syrian Orthodox Church in their varied nuances and shades and that too in an unambiguous style. Moderns, of course will have to bear with the archaic Malayalam in which it is written. To accord authenticity to his contentions, Mor Dionysius, however, has adduced appropriate citations from the Holy Bible. Besides, the bishop himself has acknowledged that his work has been moulded after the scholarly writings of the great Maphryono Mor Gregorios Bar Ebroyo, of the 13<sup>th</sup> century of our era, the unrivalled savant and scion of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church. All these facts stand testimony to the indepth knowledge of the late author regarding the sources of theology and ecclesiology of the Syrian Church. Undoubtedly it appears that this high priest was impelled to write this work as he felt that the faithful flock of sheep of the S.O.C. was being seduced due to their lack of knowledge or apathy towards the Church, which truly is the icon of Trinity and the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. When all said and done, the author knew that ignorance is no excuse and that it is the womb of all scepticism. This work of his, did dispel the encircling gloom of despondency to which the faithful had fallen. May his effort find fruition in the future.

What a gladdening news that a few dedicated and devout members of our Church have garnered their might and wherewithal to bring out an English translation of the bishop's original version of the book entitled *Mathopadesa Sarangal*. May their tribe increase.

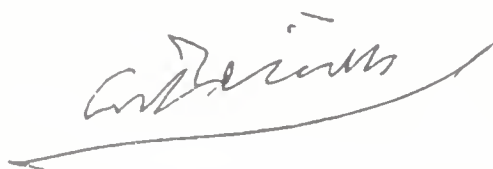
It may be a surprising news to the present generation that in the twenties of the past century there was no book at all on the history and faith of the Church, except this laudable work of the greatest scholar of that time. This prestigious book had been the only source of my study of the faith of the Church and all my successive works of the Doctrine of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

I do most sincerely congratulate Prof. O. M. Mathew for presenting this most prestigious book - the foundation of all my Doctrinal books - to the new generation everywhere in Christendom and to all those who honour the earliest Christian Doctrines.

Prof. O.M. Mathew Oruvattithara, deserves credit for having undertaken the task of translating this treatise into English. His comments appear to be apt and appealing. They are quite instructive and informative as well, especially as to what the Church ought to be in modern times.

Kanjiramattom,

09-10-2006



**Kaniamparambil Curian Corepiscopa**



## *Translator's Note*

As I sat down to translate the small but substantial malayalam compendium or small book captioned *Mathopadesa Sarangal* - the 1908 edn.-, (Quintessence of Religious Doctrines) authored by the late lamented erudite and scholarly priest, Rev. Fr. Geevarghese Vattasseril, Malankara Malpan of the then undivided Church, who later on became Metropolitan Mor Dionysius VI<sup>th</sup>, I became aware of my temerity or audacity as some would prefer to qualify. But I really had realised the wisdom of the adage that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Very soon, however, I felt that my attempt or venture was the result of a calling of God communicated to me through the suggestions of friends like Sri. Thomas Daniel (Reji), Karimpanackal, Cheppaud and Sri. John Philip, Kottaparambil, Kottayam. And I started to write. Earlier than expected I could finish due to the dual operation of the divine and the human help. The latter, mainly came from Mrs. Jolly Mathew, my wife, who transcribed my manuscript and gave constant encouragement to proceed braving the subtleties of the subject matter.

Anybody who takes the pains of reading this work will be awe struck by the depth and width of the author's vast reading. All the thirty four themes that His Grace has dealt with have been elucidated with the utmost lucidity. He has substantiated them by appropriate biblical citations. Thus the Bishop has shown that the tenets of the Syrian Orthodox Church are not the fancies of some fanatics but have emerged out of the ruminating reflections on the revealed truths contained in the Holy Bible. Verily Syrian Orthodox Church holds the Bible along with the Tradition as the two fundamental sources of her theology and ecclesiology. This was well brought out by the great Mor Gregorios Bar Ebroyo, the unrivalled historian cum canonist of the S.O.C. For the Syrian Orthodox

Church, any attempt to separate the two sources or treat anyone of them to the exclusion of the other would render the one a corpse and the other a cripple. The two are to be studied in tandem. Anybody who studies this work cannot but honour and love the Syrian Orthodox Church and will never suffer her being branded archaic and her practices obsolete. In the ineffable divine dispensation, Mor Dionysius was not destined to spend much time in academic pursuits and author many books of this genre. We the faithful children of the Mother Church mourn and groaningly state that his was the misfortune and ours was the tragedy.

The translation is in response of the ever growing demand for this book by the English knowing Church members both in the diaspora and India, as it contains the doctrines of the Church. Truly these members are impelled by the aphorism of Mor Ephrem, the Syrian and Cyprian of Carthage that he who did not know the Church as our Mother could not know God as the Father. In order to do justice to the original of the Bishop's biblical citations, I had to consult different versions of the Bible brought out by the Syrian Orthodox, the Catholic and the Protestant Churches. Then I had to exercise my faculty judiciously to pick up that Bible version which seemed both approximate and appropriate to the subject dealt with. The notations and the abbreviations used are detailed in the appendix.

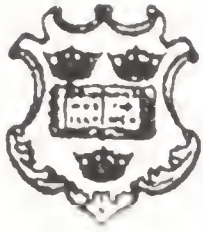
My thanks to the various persons and organisations who have rendered invaluable help in bringing to light this translation. I acknowledge my indebtedness to SOCMNet.org (SOCM Forum) and Mor Adai Study Centre, Cheeranchira, Changanacherry, Kerala, India for taking the heavy responsibility of publishing this treatise.

I take this opportunity to thank the Lord Almighty who showered on me grace upon grace to bring forth this work. To Him I offer my salutations again and yet again.

Kottayam,

**O.M. MATHEW ORUVATTITHARA**

10-10-2006.



THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE  
PUSEY LANE  
OXFORD  
OX1 2LE

Telephone (01865) 278200

## *Evaluation of The Book*

*It is a great pleasure  
to comment my friend  
Prof. O. M. Mathew for making  
this English translation of the  
present rather comprehensive  
catechism. It is to be hoped that  
it will prove useful for a variety  
of different readers.*

*Sebastian Brock*

Kottayam,  
09.09.2006

Dr. Sebastian Brock  
The Oriental Institute  
University of Oxford



### *Abbreviations used*

G.N.B.	-	Good News Bible, Bible Society of India 206. Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bangalore- 560 001, India.
K.J.V.	-	King James Version - Barbour Publishing, Inc, P. O. Box 719 Whrichsville, Ohio, 44683, USA.
P.O.C.	-	Pastoral Orientation Centre of Kerala Catholic Bible Society, Cochin 682 025, India. (Malayalam Version of the Holy Bible)
L.B.	-	The Learning Bible, Contemporary English Version, American Bible Society, 1865, Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023, USA.
V.G.	-	<i>Visudhagrandham</i> , The Syrian Orthodox Bible Society of India, Tiruvalla, 689 101, India (Malayalam Version of the Holy Bible in Pshitha Syriac).
S.O.C.	-	Syrian Orthodox Church
O.T.	-	Old Testament
N.T.	-	New Testament
Com.	-	Comment by the Translator

*Old Testament Abbreviations*

Gen.	-	Genesis	Song	-	Song of Songs
Ex.	-	Exodus	Is.	-	Isaiah
Lev.	-	Leviticus	Jer.	-	Jeremiah
Num.	-	Numbers	Lam.	-	Lamentations
Deut.	-	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	-	Ezekiel
Josh.	-	Joshua	Dan.	-	Daniel
Judg.	-	Judges	Hos.	-	Hosea
Ruth	-	Ruth	Joel	-	Joel
1Sam.	-	1Samuel	Amos	-	Amos
2Sam	-	2Samuel	Obad	-	Obadiah
1Kgs.	-	1Kings	Jon	-	Jonah
2Kgs.	-	2Kings	Mic.	-	Micah
1Chr.	-	1Chronicles	Nah.	-	Nahum
2Chr.	-	2Chronicles	Hab.	-	Habakkuk
Ezra	-	Ezra	Zeph.	-	Zephaniah
Neh.	-	Nehemiah	Hag.	-	Haggai
Esth.	-	Esther	Zech.	-	Zechariah
Job	-	Job	Mal.	-	Malachi
Ps.	-	Psalms	1Mac.	-	1Macabees
Prov.	-	Proverb	2Mac.	-	2Macabees
Ecc.	-	Ecclesiastes			

*New Testament Abbreviations*

Mt.	-	Matthew
Mk.	-	Mark
Lk.	-	Luke
Jn.	-	John
Acts	-	Acts of the Apostles
Rom.	-	Romans
1Cor.	-	1Corinthians
2Cor.	-	2Corinthians
Gal.	-	Galatians
Eph.	-	Ephesians
Phil.	-	Philippians
Col.	-	Colossians
1Ths.	-	1Thessalonians
2Ths.	-	2Thessalonians
1Tim.	-	1Timothy
2Tim.	-	2Timothy
Tit.	-	Titus
Phlm.	-	Philemon
Heb.	-	Hebrews
Jas.	-	James
1Pet.	-	1Peter
2Pet.	-	2Peter
1Jn.	-	1John
2Jn.	-	2John
3Jn.	-	3John
Jude	-	Jude
Rev	-	Revelation



## *Preface*

It is essential that each one of the votaries of a religion should know its doctrines. Experience has, however, testified, that on account of the extreme paucity of dogmatic treatises of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Malayalam, many of Her members in Malankara tend to study the books of other sects, that are handy. As such initial learnings create on their minds the preliminary knowledge about religion, they consider them to be true and pure. Consequently, many members of the Orthodox Church turn renegade and launch tirade against Her tenets. Even though this text will not be able to completely solve the lacuna of the lack of books, it is hoped, that this will be helpful to provide the members of the Church general information with regard to the beliefs and tenets of the Church and thereby preserve them in Orthodoxy. This book has been prepared after the scrutiny of the authentic treatises like *Mnorath Qudshe*, *[Kthobo d-] Zalge*, *Canon* etc. of authors such as Mor Gregorios Bar Ebroyo et. al. As an appendix, the names of the heretics that arose in the Church, in the days gone by and their heresies have been incorporated. This is in deference to the desire expressed by various persons to know such happenings.

[The Author]

Kottayam,

10-01-1900



## Theme No: 1

# On the Blessed Trinity

1. There is a living and true God, as the Creator of all that is visible and invisible.

- Ref.:*
- (a) Gen. 1:1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (L.B.)
  - (b) Is. 44:24. I am the Lord, the Creator of all things (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Deut. 5:26. Has any human being ever lived after hearing the living God speak from a fire (G.N.B.)
  - (d) 1 Jn. 5:20. We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we know the true God. We live in union with Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and this is eternal life (G.N.B.)
  - (e) Dan. 2:28. But there is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The Syrian Orthodox Church affirms that there is a God as the cause of every creation. This assertion is not based on any objective proof, because God is beyond every logical category. It is rather rooted in subjective faith. So faith is the bedrock of Her theology. The Syrian Orthodox Church concedes that faith of course is a gift of God. Through theology, faith is analyzed to facilitate reinforcement of it. The affirmation about the creator is further amplified in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed professed by the S.O.C.

2. There is no other God besides this sole and single God, who is the prime cause of everything.

- Ref.:*
- (a) Is. 43:11. I alone am the Lord, the only one who can save you (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Is. 45:5, 6. Only I am the Lord; there are no other gods... I am the Lord and that there is no other God (L. B.)



*Comment*

Monotheism is upheld by this profession of faith. Obviously it is a legacy to the Semitic Christianity from Judaism. Although the S.O.C. through her Trinitarian formula upholds Trinity, it in no way contravenes Monotheism, as Her belief in Trinitarianism is not Tritheism or belief in three gods. It is rather a belief in the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who are co-equal, co-eval and in perfect communion with each other of the Trinity. This may be expressed through the doctrine of *Perichoresis* or interpenetration among the three Persons of the Trinity. It implies that what inheres in any of the Persons of Trinity, ipso facto or by the very same fact exists in the other two as well.

3. This God, the One God, is without beginning; but eternal;

- Ref:* (a) Is. 41:4... I was there at the beginning; I will be there at the end. (L.B.)
- (b) Is. 43:10... Understand that I am the only God. Besides me there is no other god; there never was and never will be (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

God has no beginning because He transcends time. Although absolute time is incomprehensible to human intellect, it is to be deemed as an appertinent of God. God is not bound or ruled by time. For human intellect, time becomes a rational category only in the backdrop of other categories of space and causation. All these three aspects are uniquely absent in God. Hence God is eternal.

4. Without body.

- Ref:* Jn. 4:24. God is a spirit (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

God is incorporeal or has no body. This articulates that God is not subject to mutation or change or degeneration or decay.

5. Invisible to mortal eyes.

*Ref:* 1 Tim. 6:16... Whom no man hath seen, nor can see (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

As God is without body, He, as such cannot be comprehended through mortal eyes. In other words, God, the spirit cannot be seen by human eyes, which are subject to change. The experience of the divine as light, fire, wind, sound etc. are at best the subjective experience of certain aspects of God, moulded as they are by the culture and environment of the experiences. To put it in the terminology of the logician, some divinity is experienced in parts.

6. Omnipotent.

*Ref:* (a) Mt. 19:26... But with God all things are possible (K.J.V.)

(b) Lk. 1:37. For, with God nothing shall be impossible. (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

God's omnipotence does not contravene natural laws, which all His creations are subject to. His omnipotence signifies that He has brought out the entire cosmos from nothingness at His own will and fixed immutable laws for the working of the whole universe. His creation transcends the categories of space, time and causation. This is the true meaning of omnipotence.

7. Omniscient.

*Ref:* Ps. 147:5... His wisdom cannot be measured. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

God is Omniscient. He has, to put it in ordinary parlance, both foreknowledge and hind-knowledge on the universal plane. He knows everything without any medium. This has been expatiated by Mor Ephrem. It is because of the omniscience that He is said to be the eternal and everlasting fountain of all knowledge.

## 8. Omnipresent.

*Ref:* Ps. 139:8. If I went up to heaven, you would be there; if I lay down in the world of the dead, you would be there. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The omnipresence of God is related to the two characteristics mentioned above. As He is omnipresent, He is the witness of all actions, performed at every times and climes. Even though He has all these three characters of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, it should not be presumed that God would act in a whimsical manner, totally denying freedom of choice of men. If God had acted in this way, there would not have been the scope for human history, which for students of theology, is salvation history or soteriology.

## 9. Full in goodness.

*Ref:* Ex. 34:6. I the Lord, am a God who is full of compassion and pity, who is not easily angered and who shows great love and faithfulness. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Despite His omnipotence and its cognates, described above, God's mercy and compassion are unfathomable. In Syrian tradition next to His *isness* or *beingness* the distinguishing feature of God is mercifulness or inexhaustible compassion. It was by dwelling upon this theme, that some theologians like *Origen* landed in the heresy of *akaphatastasis*, which means that God will grant pardon to every sinner including Satan and his hosts.

## 10. Indeterminable.

*Ref:* Job. 11:7 .... Can you understand the mysteries surrounding God, the all powerful. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

God is indeterminable. It signifies that He transcends all the categories of epistemology or sources of knowledge. The



reason why some poet theologians and mystics like Mor Ephrem indulged profusedly in paradoxes to determine and describe God, is due to the fact that God cannot be put in straight formulae or because God defies definition.

11. Immutable.

*Ref:* Jas. 1:17. He is always the same and never makes dark shadows by changing. (L.B.)

*Comment*

Immutableness of God is related to His perfection and completeness. Anything that changes can never be perfect or complete. Change or flux is the feature of imperfect bodies with which this world is made of. Change signifies the want or absence of something.

12. The Lord of all.

*Ref.:* Lk. 10:21. My Father, Lord of heaven and earth. (L.B.)

*Comment*

God is the sovereign Lord. No one is superior to Him. So He does not have to pay obedience to anyone else. At the same time He has the right to receive obedience from His creation. The reason why God is accorded habitual obedience from the bulk of His creation is due to the recognition of His overlordship. In fact, sin actually signifies the breaking of obedience to God the Lord. However, the detractors will get pardon if they choose to repent with a contrite heart.

13. In this Godhead there are three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*Ref:* (a) Gen. 1:26. And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea... (K.J.V.)

(b) Gen. 11:7... Let us go down and there confound their language... (K.J.V.)

(c) Mt. 3:16... And as soon as he came out of the water the sky opened and he saw the spirit of God coming

down on him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my own dear Son and I am pleased with him." (L.B.)

- (d) Mt. 28:19... Baptise them, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (L.B.)

### Comment

One of the distinguishing features of the Christian monotheism is that it is Trinitarian also, simultaneously The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the three Persons of the Trinity, evince perfect communion or unity among themselves.

14. This signifies unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity without implying distinction of any sort as regards temporality, existence or stature or potentiality among the three Persons. These three have, rather, the very same *ousia* or nature, regality, disposition, determination, power, uniqueness and method of functioning.

*Ref:* Is. 6:3. And one cried unto another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. (K.J.V.)

### Comment

It is not enough to simply state that the Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity is oriented to monotheism or manifests unity in itself. Equally it can be asserted that the converse too is true. It is always, however, good to remember that Trinity is quite inexplicable and a mystery, which escapes human comprehension. The Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa had to strain every nerve to articulate the Trinitarian doctrine at the Council of Ephesus.

## Theme No: 2

# On God the Father

1. The Father, who is one of the Persons of Trinity, is Almighty:

*Ref:* Jn. 10:29. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand (K.J.V.)

### *Comment*

Every attribute of God is applicable to the Father, of course not to the exclusion of the other two Persons. This latter aspect is because of the operation of *perichoresis*. Subject to this it may be said that the Father is all-powerful.

2. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, in addition to all that is seen and unseen. Besides He is the generator of the Logos or Word the Son, who is begotten of Him at the beginningless time. Also, He possesses all the characteristics and features of Godhead.

*Ref:* 1Cor. 8:6. But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we in him; (K.J.V.)

### *Comment*

The relation of God the Father to Cosmos as well as His primordial nature are brought out here in qualifying Him as the Creator. The S.O.C. believes in Creation *ex-nihilo* or out of nothingness. So the Church does not approve of the theory that God gave an orientation or reorientation of matter which had been in existence and that He brought out Cosmos out of Chaos. Nor does the S.O.C. believe in the emanation theory, put forward by some philosophers. His relation to the Son is one of generation from the beginning of the beginningless time.



## Theme No: 3

### On the Son

1. Jesus, who is one of the Persons of Trinity and who is the Word cum Son of God the Father, is begotten of the Father from eternity.

*Ref:* (a) Jn. 1:1. In the beginning was the one who is called the word. The word was with God and was truly God. (L.B.)

(b) Jn. 1:14... We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father (L.B.)

#### *Comment*

The Son can be treated as the second Person for the sake of enumeration. Although begotten of the Father He is the ancient of the days. In other words, there was not a time when the Son was not, as Saint Athanasius the great of Alexandria put it at the Nicene council of 325 C.E. It implies that He is co-eval with the Father. Besides, He is co-equal in power with the Father. This further signifies that there is no subordination for the Son. By this assertion the S.O.C. refutes the cardinal doctrine of Arius that Jesus the Son, is a created one.

2. Uncreated as Jesus is, He has the very same substance as the Father and the Holy Spirit have.

*Ref:* Jn. 10:30. The Father and I are one. (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

The relation of the Son to the Father is further elucidated here. He is of the same *ousia* or nature and of the same substance as of the Father. This is categorically proclaimed in the Creed of the S.O.C.

3. As willed by Himself, the Father and the Holy Spirit, and without causing any mutation to His own Godhead, he condescended

from heaven and was born a man from the immaculate virgin, for the salvation of mankind.

- Ref:*
- (a) Mal. 3:6. I am the Lord and I do not change (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Heb. 2:14. Since the children as he calls them are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Jn. 1:14. The word became a human being and ... lived among us (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

His incarnation through the Virgin was on His own volition, expressed of course through the co-operation of the Holy Spirit. There was not an iota of persuasion, let aside, compulsion on the second Person of Trinity for this mystery or marvel. It is due to the operation of the divine dispensation and *Perichoresis*, an inherent characteristic of the Blessed Trinity. The main purpose of this episode was the salvation of mankind. Thus what was planned through Israel and her prophets was consummated in the incarnation of the Lord. Salvation became necessary because of the fall of mankind following the disobedience of the first parents. Even though He was born of the Virgin, His Mother Mary remained ever Virgin. For the S.O.C. this is what is implied by the immaculacy of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The S.O.C. does not hold that she was born in an immaculate way as her Son was.

#### 4. Suffered truly in person.

*Ref:* Acts 1:3... after Jesus had suffered and died (L.B.)

### *Comment*

By this assertion the Church, reaffirms that the suffering of Jesus was not a mere fantasy or apparition as the supporters of *Docetism* held. *Docetism* was a second century heresy. According to it the body of Christ was only a resemblance, or else of ethereal substance. It implies that Christ's body was not similar to that of humans.

## 5. Was Crucified.

*Ref:* Mk. 15:24... then they crucified him... (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

His Crucifixion was also not a magical feat or feint or illusion. He died on the Cross, on His own accord.

## 6. Tasted death.

*Ref:* Rom. 5:6. Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful (L.B.)

*Comment*

He died in reality as was proved by the flow of blood and water from His side when the soldier pierced it. Unlike what was propagated by the *Docetists* or some other heretics, His death was not an apparition but a reality.

## 7. Was buried.

*Ref:* 1Cor. 15:4. He was buried... (L.B.)

*Comment*

In accordance with the Jewish custom, the body of Jesus was buried before the Sabbath had set in. Sabbath for the Jews is on Saturday. But the day is computed from dusk to dusk. Hence the haste in burying the corpse of Jesus on Friday itself, the day on which Jesus was crucified.

## 8. Descended to the sheol, preached to the spirits there;

*Ref:* 1Pet. 3:19. Christ then preached to the spirits that were kept in prison (L.B.)

*Comment*

He then descended to the Sheol, which to some Jewish thinking was the place where all the departed souls were put. It was a place of gloom cum eerie silence. According to the Jewish theology these souls were to be there until the Day of Judgement. This descent of Jesus shows that His mission was not confined to the salvation of those living but rather extended to those of the dead as well. After all, no



Christian should make such a distinction between the living and the dead because according to Christian Ecclesiology the mystical body of Jesus that is the Ecclesia or the Church comprises of both the dead and the living.

9. After his resurrection,

- Ref:* (a) Acts 2:32. God has raised this very Jesus from death and we are all witnesses to this fact (G.N.B.)
- (b) Lk. 24:39. Look at my hands and my feet and see that it is myself. Feel me, and you will know, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as you can see I have. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

He was resurrected in fulfilment of His own utterances and those of the prophets of antiquity. So the role of His own will in resurrection cannot be marginalised as heretics like the *Navadians* would say.

10. On the fortieth day, he ascended to the heavens in the high and sat at the right hand side of his father.

- Ref:* Lk. 24:51. As he was blessing them he departed from them and was taken up into heaven (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Jesus ascended to Heaven on the fortieth day. Unlike in the case of Enoch or Elijah no external media are found in this episode. It happened as per the will of the Godhead. That is all. Right side signifies the virtuous or noble portion. The ascension marks the culmination of the earthly mission of Jesus. Before this event, Jesus gave instructions, besides the one He had already given to St. Peter, with regard to the Ecclesial mission of the Apostles.

11. The fact that he became man does not in anyway imply that He merely indwelt in an upright man born of a woman. It rather signifies that he who is verily God became really human not by copulation but by the Holy Spirit and of the virgin.

- Ref.:* (a) Heb. 2:16. For it is clear that it is not the angels that he helps; instead as the scripture says "He helps the descendants of Abraham." (G.N.B.)
- (b) Jn. 1:14. The word became a human being full of grace and truth, lived among us (G.N.B.)
- (c) Is. 7:14. But the Lord will still give you proof. A virgin is pregnant; she will have a son and will name him Immanuel. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

His incarnation as man is not a mere indwelling of God, the Word, in a just person. If so, it could, at best, be a case of possession. Jesus or the Word on the other hand became man in reality, by the flesh that he received from the Virgin and through the Holy Spirit.

12. In this process of the Son becoming man, His divine hypostasis or nature did not change into that of human. Nor did the human nature eclipse the divine one, nor did the two natures become or give birth to a new entity, nor did any one of the natures cause obliteration or annihilation of the other. Nonetheless, the two hypostases of divinity and humanity got united into one perfect Person, evenwhile maintaining absolutely the divine nature and human disposition sans sin. This union is a great mystery.

- Ref.:* (a) Col. 2:9. For, the full content of divine nature lives in Christ, in his humanity (G.N.B.)
- (b) Heb. 2:9. Because of God's wonderful kindness Jesus died for everyone (G.N.B.)
- (c) Tit. 2:13. We are filled with hope as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (L.B.)
- (d) Tim. 3:16. No one can deny how great is the secret of our religion. He appeared in human form was shown to be right by the spirit and was seen by angels. He was preached among nations, was believed in throughout the world and was taken up to heaven. (G.N.B.)

- (e) Heb. 1:2. But in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

There was no mutation to His divine nature when He assumed a human body. The natures of humanity and divinity got inseparably united but without joining and without undermining in any way anyone of the natures. This phenomenon, however, gave rise to the so called heresy associated with Nestor, the Byzantine Patriarch. It must be admitted that the mixing and their modes of union of two natures would remain ever a mystery.

13. As the union has been accomplished in perfection no subsequent separation into two hypostases or persons is possible. The two natures are fused together as to form one nature, one Person, one countenance or *persupa* meaning face, (which cannot be seen with the mortal eyes; but visible only through the inner luminous eye.) one disposition, and one functioning. He is true God and true human, simultaneously.

*Ref.:* Eph. 4:5. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The union of two natures, as noted above, is a mystery. Therefore, whatsoever the humans may say, by engaging the ordinary categories of logic, it will be only an approximation to truth. That is why it is said, that it is comprehensible only by the luminous inner eye.

14. Even at the moment of His death, when the soul separated from the body, His divinity did not depart either from the body or the soul but remained in tact with each of them.

*Ref.:* Jn. 19:34. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. (K.J.V.)

### *Comment*

Even at the time of the death of Jesus, His divinity did not depart but remained with Him. Some schools of thought, as



the *Docetists*, have cast doubts about this happening. Logically they may appear to be correct. But Christ-events transcend human logic. If divinity had departed from Christ at the time of His death it seems unintelligible as to how could salvation be effected by His death on the Cross. If so, the bulk of the prophetic utterances regarding the Crucifixion of Christ would have been superfluous.

15. As Jesus, through resurrection did transform his body incorruptible, death lost its sway over it.

*Ref.:* Rom. 6:9. For we know that Christ has been raised from death and will never die again - death will no longer rule over him. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

His body became incorruptible after death because it was transformed into something ethereal. According to Pauline theology it is corruption of human body that leads to the event, 'death'. Therefore, it can be inferred that death could not claim the incorrupt ethereal body of Christ.

16. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one shall be saved except through Him.

*Ref.:* (a) Jn. 14:6. Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. (G.N.B.)

(b) Acts. 4:12. "Salvation is to be found in him alone... (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

As the only begotten Son of the Father and as He was prepared to offer himself as the pledge for human beings, He alone had the right to lead mankind towards redemption. This is the crux of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. Verily, He is the only Saviour for all times. This strikes a note of difference with certain other religions, which stand for incarnations of God from age to age. A typical case is that of Hinduism, especially Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism is the doctrine which upholds Lord Vishnu as the supreme God in

the Hindu pantheon. In Vaishnavism, typically, Vishnu is said to take birth in different forms from age to age.

17. He shall come again with the plenitude of his glory, to judge the living and the departed.

*Ref.:* Acts. 17:31. He has set a day when he will judge the world's people with fairness. And he has chosen the man Jesus to do the judging for him. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

Jesus is not only the Saviour; He is the Judge also. So on that day which only the Father knows, Jesus would come again with all the glory. This event is called *Parousia* or in ordinary language the second coming. Then He would judge not only the living but also the dead. Until *Parousia*, however, there is scope for repentance. The second coming is affirmed in the profession of the creed of the S.O.C.

## Theme No: 4

# On the Holy Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit who is one of the Persons of Trinitarian God and who is the Paraclete or Peace-giver is co-equal with both the Father and the Son, uncreated and eternal.

*Ref.:* (a) 2Cor. 3:18. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as the Spirit of the Lord. (K.J.V.)

(b) 2Cor. 13:14. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. (K.J.V.)

### *Comment*

The Holy Spirit is the third Person in the Blessed Trinity. He is the peace-giver besides the bestower of the seven gifts. They are wisdom, understanding, inspiration, fortitude, meekness, piety and love of the Lord. Holy Spirit is uncreated, co-equal and co-eval with the Father and the Son.

2. He proceeds from the Father.

*Ref.:* Jn. 15:26... I will send him to you from the Father and he will speak about me. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The S.O.C. holds that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. As He is co-eval with the Father, the beginning of this procession is also from the beginningless time as that of the Father Himself.

3. He is taken from the Son, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,

*Ref.:* Jn. 16:14. He will give me glory because he will take what I say and tell it to you. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

He is taken from the Son as well. The term 'taken' appears



to be the direct derivation of what is stated in John 16:14. It does not imply that He 'proceeds' from the Son as He does from the Father. Therefore, for the S.O.C. there is no double procession or the '*filioque principle*' as held by the Roman Catholic Church and some of the Western Churches. It may be noted here that it was the upholding of this doctrine of double procession that caused a 'schism' between the Roman Church and the Byzantine Church in 1054 A.D. This 'schism' is referred to as the 'Great Schism'. As the Holy Spirit is taken from the Son, sometimes He is referred to as the Paraclete of the Son. Although the S.O.C. does not uphold the *filioque* clause, She affirms that the Holy Spirit is 'taken' from the Son.

4. And who spoke through the prophets and the Apostles.

- Ref.: (a) 2Pet. 1:21. The prophets did not think these things upon their own, but they were guided by the Spirit of God. (L.B.)
- (b) Mt. 10:20. For, the words you will speak will not be yours; they will come from the spirit of your Father, speaking through you. (G.N.B)

*Comment*

The prophets and the Apostles could preach and prophesise because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration is one of the worldly gifts from the Holy Spirit.

## Theme No: 5

# On the Holy Sacraments

### *Introduction*

The Holy Sacraments are decreed and instituted by our Lord as essentials for the salvation of mankind and are the very visible rituals of invisible grace. They are also known as sacred mysteries. They are enumerated below.

### *Comment*

Sacraments are sometimes referred to as mysteries. The S.O.C. uses the term '*rozo*' to denote mystery. Man cannot comprehend the abstract and the absolute through the senses. The highest cannot be spoken of. They can, at the most, be enacted. This inevitable factor of the limitation of the human mind has given rise to the engaging of visible and audible media to bring home the abstract metaphysical truths. In other words, man requires a body language besides the ordinary one to understand the abstract. So symbols have come to be associated in the celebration of sacraments. The sacraments are the representative manifestations of the spiritual secrets. Even Jesus employed them as in the *Anaphora* or raising up of the hosts or bread and wine.

#### 1. Baptism.

*Ref.:* Jn. 3:5... No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Baptism literally means bathing or immersion in water. This has come to Christianity through the practice of St. John the Baptist, who according to some scholars was a member of the *Qumran* sect of the Jews. *Qumran* sect is also referred to as the *Essenes* community. It was a Judaistic sect which stood for other worldliness. This sect occupied the *Qumran* area in the northwest corner of the Dead Sea 10 miles south

of Jericho. The members led a communal life, in meditation and other religious pursuits. Baptism is the rite of initiation. The theology of baptism is that through it the candidate puts on Christ. Syrian Fathers relate baptism with the Motherhood of the Church. Mor Ephrem the Syrian, develops this idea by saying that the baptismal font is the womb of the Mother Church. For Paul, immersion into the baptismal water and arousing from it represented dying and resurrecting with Christ.

## 2. Eucharist.

*Ref.:* Jn. 6:53. Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth; if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Eucharist, like baptism has been considered as an antique sacrament. The last supper of Lord Jesus was the first Eucharist. Even before St. Paul's epistles or gospels were written, this sacrament had come to be ceremoniously observed by the Christian community. Ignatius of Antioch eulogises the Eucharist as the bond among Christians and link with Christ. Mor Ephrem uses the imagery of the burning coal, taken from the vision of the prophet Isaiah. He goes on to describe it as the medicine of immortality. If this sacrament is the conclusive event of Christ's public ministry, it is the inauguration of the public functioning of the Church or the Ecclesia. The Church hails it as the sacrament of the sacraments. Various names, like thanks giving, sacrifice, Holy Communion etc. are employed to denote this sacrament.

## 3. Confession.

*Ref.:* Jas. 5:16. So then confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect. (L.B.)



*Comment*

Confession is sometimes referred to as the rite of penance or reconciliation. In this sacrament man admits and God acquits. To explain; the sinner repents and God replenishes that child of His by his abundant grace. When the created regrets the Creator responds. Syrian Fathers like Mor Ephrem frequently speak of sin as a wound which requires healing and Christ as the healer par excellence. Theologically the effect of confession is that sins and their imprints are completely wiped off by confession. Once Jesus forgives the sins, He forgets them forever.

## 4. Chrismation.

*Ref.:* 1Jn. 2:27. As long as His Spirit remains in you, you do not need anyone to teach you... (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Chrismation is the sacrament that fortifies one with the holy Spirit to fight temptation. It was contended by Oriental Fathers like Cyril of Alexandria that when anointed by the Holy oil or Chrism the baptized received the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, noted already in this book. According to the Church Fathers, the Holy Spirit was symbolised by objects like air, fire, dove, oil, etc.. Cyril of Jerusalem contends that just as Jesus received the Spirit in the form of a dove, so the oil anointed on the baptised provides sanctification by the spirit to the baptised candidate.

## 5. Holy Orders.

*Ref.:* Heb. 5:4. Only God can choose a priest and God is the one who chose Aaron. (L.B.)

*Comment*

The seed of Christian priesthood is Christ Himself. 'Priest' is the icon of Christ. The calling or vocation that Jesus made to Peter and the Apostles was one to be performed in perpetuity until the '*Parousia*'. So the priests are endowed with the authority and spiritual grace for the ministration of all other

sacraments. If all those who are baptised have royal priesthood, those of the priestly hierarchy alone have ministerial priesthood. In one of the ancient Syriac hymns, priesthood is extolled as follows. 'While kingship is honored in the world, priesthood is revered both in the world and heaven'. Therefore, no body shall raise the hands against the anointed of God. Priesthood is one of the *notae* or distinguishing marks of the Church. And this mark is derived from that of Apostolicity.

## 6. Matrimony.

*Ref.:* Mt. 19:5, 6. ... "For the reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife and the two will become one. So they are no longer two but one. Man must not separate, then what God has joined together. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

For our Lord Jesus, there was no doubt that marriage was of divine dispensation, although it is solemnised by humans. The participation of Jesus at the marriage at Cana speaks much of its significance. Jesus deprecated divorce. Following this, the Church considers marriage to be permanent and indissoluble. Aphrahat the Syrian Father, who was a contemporary of Mor Ephrem, writes in his 'Demonstrations' that marriage was one of the good things that God has commanded to be established. Mor Ephrem refuted the views of the heretical Marcionite school and asserted that marriage, family and possessions were lawful. Curiously enough marriage is not considered to be a sacrament by the Assyrian Church of the East.

## 7. Anointing of the sick or extreme unction.

*Ref.:* (a) Jas. 5:14. If you are sick ask the priest to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord. (L.B.)

(b) Num. 8:1-2. The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron that when he puts the seven lamps on the

lamp-stand, he should place them so that the light shines towards the front.” (G.N.B.)

(c) vide Num. 4:2. (G.N.B.)

### Comment

Anointment of the sick has come out of the healing ministry, which was a common feature during the Apostolic period. What the Church performs through the anointing of the sick is nothing but the fulfilment of the Mission performed by the Master and His disciples. Two points are to be noted. It is not only a medicinal act, but a religious one too, as sins are absolved by the anointment. Secondly, it is not to be administered to those persons only, whose end is drawing near. Hence, a change in the conception of name regarding the sacrament has come about. Accordingly, the emphasis has shifted from that of *Extreme Unction* to that of the ‘Anointment of the Sick’. Perhaps the change might have been due to the psychological factor of relieving the tension caused by the name *Extreme Unction*, in the human mind.

8. Out of these seven sacraments five are obligatory for all. Matrimony and Holy Orders are optional. Every sacrament must be solicited after due preparation and eligibility. Those who receive accordingly shall obtain new grace to those they already possess.

### Comment

Neither the approach of the candidates seeking sacraments nor the attitude of the ministers who administer them shall be perfunctory or casual. They must be based on religious fervour because all the sacraments bestow divine grace. Hence the insistence on due preparation as a preliminary condition, for the administration and reception of the sacraments.



**Theme No: 6**  
**On the Holy Baptism**

*Introduction*

Baptism is the initiatory one among all other sacraments. Without receiving this sacrament no other sacrament can be accepted. Through this sacrament one,

1. Receives the sonship of God.

- Ref:* (a) Gal. 3:27, 29. You were once baptised into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak with the life of Christ himself. If you belong to Christ you are the descendants of Abraham and will receive what God has promised. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Jn. 3:5. "I am telling you the truth", replied Jesus. "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the water and the Spirit." (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

With regard the effects of baptism the preaching of St. Paul is to be considered. The inference to be drawn from his epistles to Galatians 3:27 and Romans 13:14 is that one gets sonship or becomes integrated into the Corpus Christie or the body of Christ through baptism. If Mother Eve gave birth to mortal children, the baptismal womb gives birth to spiritual and immortal children. Differently put, baptism awards an identity in Christ to every baptised. In other words, every baptised is deemed to be an individual son or daughter and counted as somebody in the body of Christ. This is the significance of giving a Christian a name through baptism. Awarding a title or name to someone or something amounts to owning. The O.T. account of Adam giving names to the beasts and the birds signifies man's right over them. To explicate, in baptism there are two movements. The one may be called a vertical and the other horizontal. The former implies the descent of the Holy Spirit on the baptized; the

latter signifies the integration of the baptized to the members of the Ecclesia.

## 2. Gets forgiveness of sins.

- Ref:* (a) Acts. 2:38. Peter said to them “Each of you must turn away from his sins and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven and you will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Acts. 22:16. And now, why wait any longer? Get up and be baptised and have your sins washed away by praying to him. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Baptism turns away an individual from the sinful ways to those of grace. To Theophilus of Antioch, baptism represented remission of sins and regeneration in Christ. The dynamics is as follows. Separation from God is the basis of what is termed sin. The consequent agonizing attitude is annulled by baptism through gaining entry into the ecclesial existence and the following communion with Christ. For St. Paul immersion in the baptismal ceremony symbolizes the death of sin.

## 3. And becomes eligible for the membership into the assembly of the Sons of God.

- Ref:* 1Cor. 12:13. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free have been baptised into the one body by the same Spirit and we have all been given the one Spiritual drink. (G.N.B)

### *Comment*

Through baptism one is not only integrated into the body of Christ but also gains entry into the Ecclesia or the Church. That is why the Church considers baptism as a celebration for the entire Ecclesia rather than as a private affair. After all, when sins are perpetrated or remissions obtained, they create a corresponding effect on the Ecclesia besides the

ones experienced by the individual concerned. It is because, Christian life is not only individualistic but it is corporate also.

4. Baptism and other sacraments, however, shall be received only with devotion and faith.

*Ref:* Acts. 8:36, 37. As they were going along the road, they came to a place where there was some water. The official said, "Look, here is some water. Why can't I be baptised?..." Philip replied, "you can, if you believe with all your heart". The official answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (L.B.)

### Comment

This provision is the basis for the office of the *Catechumenate* that was prevailing in the early Church. From the 'Apostolic Tradition' of *Hippolytus* we gather that the Church authorities prescribed a period of preparation to gain entry into the Christian way. During this period of preparation the candidates were instructed in the theory and practice of the Christian faith.

5. For, it is only through faith that the sonship of God and God's grace are obtained.

*Ref:* 1Gal. 3:26. It is through faith that all of you are God's sons, in union with Christ Jesus (G.N.B.)

### Comment

Both sonship and the grace of God cannot be obtained by mere external acts of deeds or words. Faith, pure and simple is the inevitable condition for getting sonship and all other graces. Here, it must be remembered that faith itself is a gift given by God to the pure in heart. Therefore everyone should develop it through spiritual practices and yearnings.

6. Objects like, holy myron, chrism, water etc used and rituals like the public profession of faith, laying on of hands, blowing of breath, consignation of cross on the forehead, which all are employed and availed of in the administration of baptism are



the representative symbols of the graces that we receive from God. Likewise they are reminders of what we ought to believe and act upon, of which all actions did Christ perform and of what the Holy Spirit does covertly. As bathing washes off the entire bodily dirt, so does baptism received with true faith and devotion wipe off all the iniquities of the soul. Therefore this sacrament has come to be christened baptism, meaning spiritual bathing.

- Ref.* (a) Rom. 6: 3, 4. For surely you know that when we were baptised into union with Christ Jesus, we were baptised into union with his death. By our baptism, then we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death by the glorious power of the Father, so also we might have a new life. (G.N.B.)
- (b) 1Pet. 3:21. Those flood waters were like baptism that now saves you. But baptism is more than just washing your body. It means turning to God with a clean conscience because Jesus Christ was raised from death. (L.B.)
- (c) Jn. 20:22. Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (G.N.B.)
- (d) Acts. 8:17. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The theology of symbols and signs used in the celebration of baptism is explained. The S.O.C. employs symbols and signs as the visible representative objects of the invisible grace. This practice has come out of the wisdom born out of deep reflection. The Syrian Fathers realized that the human mind can with ease comprehend the elusive incomprehensible realities and truths with some pointers. This is the use of symbols and signs. A danger, however, is inherent in this practice. It is the proneness to venerate symbols as if they are the realities.

7. As one approaches the plane of the light of wisdom from the dark sphere of ignorance, through baptism, it is also called the sacrament of light.

*Ref:* 1Pet. 2:9. But you are all the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light.  
(G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The imagery of light is brought in to explain the effects of baptism. Every person is deemed to be encircled by the gloom of darkness on account of the original sin, till baptism removes it. By baptism the original darkness is dispelled; human beings are thus led to the grace of the light of purity and sinlessness. There is, therefore, enough justification in christening baptism, the sacrament of light. After all is said, it is well to remember that, the prayer of man to lead from darkness to light has been a cherished one among many religions.

8. Since those who were born originally from women are reborn as the children of grace through the waters of baptism, this sacrament is hailed the born again ceremony. As the entire mankind has become victims of divine judgement not only due to omission cum commission but also because of original sin and as the entire bulk of sins is removed through baptism and grace thus obtained, this sacrament is obligatory for each one of the faithful.

*Ref:* (a) Jn. 3:3... No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. (G.N.B.)  
(b) Tit. 3:5... He saved us through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us.  
(G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Baptism is like a second birth as our Lord emphatically says to Nicodemus. The baptismal font is considered to be the

womb of the Mother Church. In 'The Hymns of Epiphany' Mor Ephrem, the lyre of the Holy Spirit, develops this theme. To use another imagery, baptism is the toll-gate for the entry of a person to the fold of the Ecclesia. Therefore, it is obligatory for everyone to pass through the sacrament of baptism.

9. For the above reasons this sacraments cannot be denied even to the infants. The office of the God parents has been constituted as a device of expediency. The God-parents are intended as the agents of the candidates for baptism, in the duty of discharging the obligation of confessing of sins, professing of faith and subsequently giving timely instructions of righteousness, rectitude and orthodoxy.

*Ref:* (a) Mark. 10:13, 14, 16. Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them; but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these..." Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them and blessed them. (G.N.B.)

(b) Gen. 17:10. You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. (G.N.B.)

(c) Gen. 17:13. Each one must be circumcised and this will be a physical sign to show that my covenant with you is everlasting. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Membership in the Church is not like obtaining citizenship. The latter devolves on a person by birth either on the basis of the doctrines of '*Jus Soli*' or '*Jus Sanguines*'. It is through the ceremony of baptism that one becomes a member of the Church. It may, however, be noted that adult baptism is still administered as and when needed. The S.O.C., unlike the Jewish community, does not at present prescribe a day or date for baptism. On the authority of Mt. 8 and Mk 2 the supporters of infant baptism argue that the baptismal parents



can fulfil all the necessary conditions for the wiping out of the sins of the baptised infants and that God would respond to the faith of the baptismal parents.

10. Baptism which accomplishes the remission of sins shall be administered only for once. Therefore, if a baptised person turns out to be a heretic but subsequently returns penitently to the fold of the believers, that person need not be baptised again. He or she is to be received into the fold on account of his or her repentance. But as regards the baptism administered by those who have erred from Orthodoxy and by those heretics who do not possess true and valid priesthood based on rightful apostolic succession, it must be deemed defective. So in such cases, an approach depending on the gravity of the heresy held and as prescribed by Hudaya Canon must be adhered to. Thus in the case of some heretics simple chrismation with Holy Myron, like administering the sacrament of the anointing of the sick will be sufficient. Whereas in some other instances simple avowal of abandoning of the heresy and the profession of orthodoxy will be enough. But in a few extreme cases the entire ceremony of baptism must be performed.

*Ref:* Eph. 4:5. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.  
(G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The theology of baptism is explained here. Baptism that was celebrated validly shall not be repeated due to the minor faults of the recipient. But this is not the case regarding the major or the very serious faults of the baptismal candidate or a baptism celebrated by priests whose ordinations are invalid. They are to be rectified canonically.

Theme No: 7

## On the Holy Eucharist

### *Introduction*

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament which provides spiritual food and drink for the sustenance cum salvation of our souls and which links us to the blessed body and blood of Jesus Christ.

1. As God the Word got united with a body possessing human nature, so in the same way God the Holy Spirit becomes present in the bread and wine offered in the sacred Eucharistic celebration.

*Ref:* Heb. 2:9. Because of God's wonderful kindness Jesus died for everyone. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The Church considers the Eucharist as a Sacrifice. The Eucharist is the reenactment of the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the central faith of the Church regarding the Eucharist. The '*Didache*', the oldest extant liturgy of the Church which summarises 'The teachings of the Lord through the twelve Apostles' applies the appellation 'sacrifice' to the Eucharist. It further declares, 'To us Thou has given Spiritual food and drink through Thy servant'. Ancient Fathers like Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, et. al. considered Eucharist as sacred sacrifice and food for the sustenance of the Spirit. The teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria, with regard to the Eucharist is the most realistic and revealing. According to him, the three Persons of the Trinity work together in the Eucharist, to accomplish our salvation.

2. In accordance with the decree of Jesus Christ, the Eucharistic elements must be believed to be the sacred body and blood of Jesus. As the human physique of Jesus is called divine because of its union with divinity, so the Holy Eucharist in which God is

present must be deemed to be divine. They are not the body and blood of Christ in physical nature but in spirit and in grace.

- Ref:*
- (a) Mk. 14:22; 23; 24. While they were eating Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples. "Take it", he said, "this is my body". Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God and handed it to them and they all drank from it. Jesus said, "This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's Covenant". (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Jn. 6:55. For, my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Mt. 26:28. This is my blood which seals God's Covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Lk. 22:19. Then he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it and gave it to them saying, "this is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." (G.N.B.)
  - (e) 1Cor. 11:24. Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread gave thanks to God broke it and said, "this is my body which is for you. Do this in memory of me." (G.N.B.)

### Comment

The Eucharist is treated as distinct from '*agape*' or the love feast, which prevailed among certain communities of the past. The 'bread and wine' the essential elements in the communal meal of the Christians came to be regarded as 'Holy Spiritual Sustenance'. This consideration was given because these offerings were in perfect fulfilment of the pronouncement of the prophet Malachi. They were regarded the body and blood of Christ because the Christians followed the instructions of Christ and also because they experienced spiritually the presence of the Lord in these elements as in Incarnation. Therefore the bread and wine, after the Eucharistic celebration are hailed holy.



3. Even though the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine do not get transformed in form and taste into the body and blood of Jesus, they are verily so.

*Ref:* 1Cor. 11:26. This means that, every time you eat this bread and drink from the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The theology of the transformation of the bread and water into the body and blood of Jesus, following the Eucharistic celebration, is explained. The transformation is not in the 'form or matter' of the elements. There are various theories such as Transubstantiation held by the Roman Catholic Church, Consubstantiation as held by the Protestant Churches, the Syrian theory without any particular name. Any way the transformation is a '*rozo*' or mystery.

4. Those who eat the bread and drink the wine with faith and devotion shall receive as a sequel, salvation and eternal life.

*Ref:* (a) 1Cor. 11:28. So then everyone should examine himself first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup. (G.N.B.)

- (b) Jn. 6:51-57. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live for ever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live. This started an angry argument among them. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat", they asked. Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth; if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you will not have life in yourselves. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him to life on the last day. For, my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. The living Father sent me and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me." (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The results of receiving the Eucharist are explained. They are not in any way material but rather of spiritual nature. Obviously remission of sins is effected. However, salvation and eternal life in Christ are the other graces that flow as a sequel.

5. Those who consume them without discrimination and devotion shall incur the judgment of God.

*Ref:* 1Cor. 11: 29, 30. For, if he does not recognise the meaning of the Lord's body, when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgment on himself as he eats and drinks. That is why many of you are weak and ill and several have died. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Those who eat and drink of the body and blood of Christ, without due preparation and in a casual manner will incur the judgement of God. The priest who administers the Eucharist to such persons, however, is not guilty of having done so.

6. Holy Eucharist is not only a blend of the blood and body of Jesus Christ.

*Ref:* 1Cor. 10:16. The cup we use in the Lord's supper and for which we give thanks to God when we drink from it, we are sharing in the blood of Christ. And the bread we break: when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

It is true that the Eucharist has come to consist of the elements of blood and body. But it is well to remember what Dr. J.S. Whale of the Cambridge University has opined: Mankind has attempted more than once to alter the constitutive elements into fish and water, cheese cakes and water, wine in place of water etc. However the Church decreed in favour of bread and wine as the elements, in deference to what Jesus employed at the Last Supper.

7. But also a sacrament and an offering as per the New Dispensation.

- Ref:*
- (a) Mal. 1:11. People from one end of the world to the other honour me. Everywhere they burn incense to me and offer acceptable sacrifices. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Mt. 5:23, 24. So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gifts there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, then come back and offer your gift to God. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Eph. 5:2. Your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Eucharist, however, is more than a mere blend of bread and wine. It is a sacrifice as well. Unlike the O.T. blood sacrifices, the Eucharist is a bloodless one. Ancient Fathers like Ignatius of Antioch, Cyprian, Irenaeus, et. al. considered Eucharist to be a sacred sacrifice. Probably due to their teachings Christians of the closing years of the First Century, if not earlier, began to revere the Eucharist as 'hallowed, mysterious and unique'.

8. This sacrifice is greater and effective than the blood sacrifices prescribed by Moses which foretasted the singular sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

- Ref:*
- (a) Heb. 9:13, 14. According to the Law of Moses, those people who became unclean are not fit to worship God. Yet they will be considered clean if they are sprinkled with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a sacrificed calf. But Christ was sinless and he offered himself as an eternal and spiritual sacrifice to God. That is why his blood is much more powerful and makes our consciences clear. (L.B.)
  - (b) Heb. 10:1. The Law of Moses is like a shadow of the



good things to come. The shadow is not the good things themselves. (L.B.)

### Comment

This kind of sacrifice was what was foreshadowed in the sacrifices offered by Malchizedek, the ones prescribed by Moses and others of Jewish antiquity. This fact is explicitly brought out in the anaphora of St. James, that the S.O.C. uses. As Jesus himself is the sacrificer and the sacrifice in the Eucharistic celebration, it is of a greater kind than the O.T. sacrifices. Again it is more effective than the Mosaic sacrifices, for, the Eucharist not only brings in the total remission of sins for the present but salvation also for eternity.

9. The Eucharist proclaims that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world is fulfilled. Also, it reminds us of his nativity, ministry, death, burial, resurrection etc. Objects such as bread, wine, altar-stone etc. used and actions like the fraction ceremony, raising of the hosts etc. that are performed are representative symbols of the objects and actions availed of by Jesus in his singular sacrifice. It is not permitted to administer the bread or the blood separately without commixing them which was effected at the time of the fraction ceremony.

Ref: (a) Lk. 22:19... Do this in memory of me. (G.N.B.)  
 (b) 1Cor. 11:24... "This is my body which is for you. Do this in memory of me." (G.N.B.)  
 (c) 1Cor. 1:26. This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (G.N.B.)

### Comment

The Eucharistic celebration is not only the self-denying sacrificial aspect of the life of Jesus. It has in it the *anamnesis* or recalling through the media of symbols and actions of the entire Christ-events from the Annunciation to the Ascension of our Lord. As bread and wine together or as a unit

represent the living Christ, the S.O.C., unlike some other Churches do, does not permit the administration of any one of these elements separately. So the S.O.C. permits the administration of only the commixed elements.

10. Since the bread and wine are commixed during the fraction ceremony, the Holy Eucharist can be administered either from the paten or chalice. As the paten and the chalice contain the Eucharist as such in toto, administering it from the paten or chalice successively or conversely is tantamount to administering the Holy Eucharist twice and is considered superfluous. It is obligatory that those who receive the Holy Eucharist must do so only after confession and saying devotional prayers. Also such candidates must observe abstinence from food in honour of this holy sacrament. But this restriction is not applicable in the case of those who are seriously sick.

- Ref:*
- (a) Rom. 6:9. For we know that Christ has been raised from death and will never die again. Death will no longer rule over them. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Is. 6:6, 7. Then one of the creatures came down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with the burning coal and said, "This has touched your lips and now your guilt is gone and your sins are forgiven." (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Jn. 6:51. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he will live for ever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

As commixing of the bread and wine is effected in the fraction ceremony and both the paten and chalice contain the Eucharist as a whole, the S.O.C. gives freedom to Her priests to administer the Eucharist either from the chalice or the paten. Some of the hymns of the S.O.C. hail the Eucharist as so holy that even, the archangels who have their bodies

made of fire fear to look at it or that Adam could not taste of it in the Paradise. Therefore the Fathers of the S.O.C. exhort every faithful to receive the Eucharist with the greatest holiness and utmost preparations like confession and penitence. The antiquarian prelates of the S.O.C. who knew the working of the human psyche do not make this particular obligation on those, who are very sick. Therefore, they prescribe only very simple and pure mental preparation for them.

11. As the bread that Christ used on the last supper was the leavened one, so the same kind must be used in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (In the Syriac language the term used for bread is '*Lahmo*' which means leavened bread. This term is not used for unleavened bread.)

*Ref:* (a) Mk. 14:22. While they were eating Jesus took a piece of bread... "It is my body." (G.N.B.)

(b) 1Cor. 5:8. Let us celebrate our passover then not with the bread having the old yeast of sin and wickedness, but with the bread that has the yeast of purity and truth. (V.G.)

### *Comment*

The S.O.C. insists on making Eucharistic bread with the leavened one unlike what some Western Churches do. The Syrian Church has a deep theology in support of Her stance. In short it is the theology of perpetuity.

12. It is revealed thus: Jesus is the living leaven that enlivens all the worlds.

*Ref:* Mt. 13:33. Jesus told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like this. A woman takes some yeast and mixes it with forty litres of flour until the whole batch of dough rises." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The theological teachings using the leavened bread are mainly the following. Firstly Jesus Himself used the leavened



bread and not the unleavened one as used in the Jewish Passover ceremony. What the Master established, the disciples ought to follow fully and completely, without amending or emending an iota from the instructions. Secondly leavened bread brings in continuity with the very first one. The dynamics is as follows. As the new batch of bread is prepared it is mixed with a small portion of previous leavened bread. So every piece of leavened bread used in the Eucharistic celebration can be traced back to the bread that Jesus Himself used. As commixing is effected in the fraction ceremony wine is there already in the bread; therefore the question of mixing the old wine with the new wine is superfluous. This leavened bread, with of course the wine in it, is verily a symbol of the crucified but living Christ.

**Theme No: 8**  
**On the Holy Confession**

*Introduction*

Confession is the sacrament in which one enumerates to the priest, the vicar of God, all the sins that have been committed, penitently solicits forgiveness from God; thereby receives remission of sins cum reconciliation with God through the intercession of the priest. This sacrament is also called the mystery of repentance or reconciliation.

*Comment*

The S.O.C. now follows the confession of auricular type i.e., sins are confessed before the priests privately. The priest hears the confession as the vicar of Jesus on earth. He has got this right, from a decree of Jesus that the priests can loose the knots of sin committed by the members of the Church. The usage 'Vicar' significantly emphasizes that the priest is only a medium for the grace of remission of sins. The actual source of this grace is Jesus Himself. As remission of sins can be effected only subject to the seeker's penitence, another name for this sacrament is that of repentance. Again, as a result of the fact that sin is nothing but an estrangement from God and the Ecclesia and as the seeker regains the lost communion with the Lord and the Church, through the sacrament of confession, this sacrament has come to be known also as that of reconciliation.

1. In the capacity as the vicars of God the priests shall render general counsels and pieces of advice to the faithful. They must rebuke openly those who go astray and bring them back to the path of righteousness. Besides, after proper assessment of the actions and the internal composure of each of the faithful, the priests shall enjoin him or her individually and prevent the flock from falling into the pitfall of follies and sins. Again, with the

love and affection becomg a father, the priest shall reprimand the believers for their iniquities and prescribe penances like fasting, alms-giving etc. as befitting each one. He shall further impress upon the erring souls, the justice of our Lord, even while consoling them by pointing to the boundless mercy of Jesus and exhorting them to seek refuge in his compassion and bounty.

- Ref:*
- (a) Mal. 2:7. It is the duty of the priest to teach the true knowledge of God. People should go to them, to learn my will, because they are the messengers of the Lord Almighty. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Ezek. 3:17-21. "Mortal man", he said, "I am making you a watchman for the nation of Israel. You will pass on to them the warnings I give you. If I announce that an evil man is going to die but you do not warn him to change his ways so that he can save his life, he will die, still a sinner, and I will hold you responsible for his death. If you do warn an evil man and he does not stop sinning, he will die, still a sinner, but your life will be spared. If a truly good man starts doing evil and I put him in a dangerous situation, he will die if you do not warn him. He will die because of his sins - I will not remember the good he did - and I will hold you responsible for his death. If you do warn a good man not to sin and he listens to you and does not sin he will stay alive and your life will also be spared." (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Tit. 1:9. He must hold firmly to the message which can be trusted and which agrees with the doctrine. In this way he will be able to encourage others with the true teaching and also to show the error of those who are opposed to it. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) 1 Tim. 5:20. Rebuke publicly all those who commit sins, so that the rest may be afraid. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The various duties of the vicars with regard to the sacrament of confession are enumerated here. The vicars have to be



both preventive and curative agents with regard to sins. To explicate, the priests have to be the friends and fathers of the faithful. So in this aspect they have to advise the members of the Ecclesia in a cordial and loving manner, on the pros and cons of the confession. They should prescribe penances that are not too heavy yokes, lest, the faithful complains of harshness. If the vicars fail on the above duties, not only they themselves but the sheep also would be lost.

2. It is quite befitting and true to the tradition to bless them in the name of our Lord after performing penitential prayer for them.

*Ref:* Lev. 5:5, 6. When a person is guilty he must confess the sin and as a penalty for his sin he must bring to the Lord a female sheep or goat as an offering. The priest shall offer the sacrifice for the man's sin.  
(G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Here again, the emphasis is that the remission of sins is effected not by the priests themselves but by Lord Jesus Himself. This becomes evident from the prayers said by the priests of the S.O.C. after they give the blessing of grace following confession.

3. Those who solicit confession must let know all their sins and the state of their conscience to the priest to facilitate him to make a true and fair adjudging necessary for the discharging of his above duties.

*Ref:* (a) Deut. 26:3-10. Go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, "I now acknowledge to the Lord my God that I have entered the land that he promised our ancestors to give us". "The priest will take the basket from you and place it before the altar of the Lord your God . Then, in the Lord's presence, you will recite these words: "My ancestor was a wandering Aramean, who took his family to Egypt to live. They were few in number when they went there. But they became a large and powerful nation. The Egyptians treated us harshly and forced us to

work as slaves. Then we cried out for help to the Lord, the God of our ancestors He heard us and saw our suffering, hardship and misery. By his great power and strength he rescued us from Egypt. He worked miracles and wonders and caused terrifying things to happen. He brought us here and gave us this rich and fertile land. So now I bring to the Lord the first part of the harvest that he has given me. Then set the basket down in the Lord's presence and worship there. (G.N.B.)

- (b) Ps. 111:1. With all my heart I will thank the Lord in the assembly of his people. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Mt. 3:6. They confessed their sins and he baptised them in the Jordan. (G.N.B.)
- (d) Mt. 8:4. Jesus said to him, "Listen! Don't tell anyone, but go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then, in order to prove to everyone that you are cured, offer the sacrifice that Moses ordered." (G.N.B.)
- (e) Acts. 19:18. Many of the believers came publicly admitting and revealing what they have done. (G.N.B.)
- (f) Jas. 5:16. So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect. (G.N.B.)
- (g) Num. 5:6, 7. When any one is unfaithful to the Lord and commits wrong against someone, he must confess his sin. (G.N.B.)
- (h) Lev. 23:26. The tenth day of the seventh month when the annual ritual is to be performed to take away the sins of the people. (G.N.B.)
- (i) Prov. 18:13. It is stupid and embarrassing to give an answer before you listen. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The faithful who seek confession shall divulge all the intentions of the covert and overt sins perpetrated by them,

since the latest confession was made. They must do so freely, frankly and fearlessly. Technically speaking, they must tell the priest only the truth and all the truth without any reservation. This must be done with a contrite heart and with a resolution not to repeat them. No faithful shall take umbrage on the plea that some extraneous force led them to commit the sins. It is because the S.O.C. does not believe in pre-determination, as some of the Western Churches preach. For the S.O.C. the onus or the burden of every sin is on the individual himself or herself. Therefore the instruction to the faithful to speak out their hearts to the priests. Only then can the priests intercede for the sinners.

4. The priest shall not divulge the confessional secrets. If he does so, he will incur the divine judgment.

*Ref:* (a) Prov. 11:13. A gossip tells everything; but a true friend will keep a secret. (L.B.)

(b) Prov. 25:9.... Do not reveal any secrets. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This is a very serious instruction to the priests. Even on the penalty of death, the priests shall not let know anybody else, the secrets confided in confession. This provision is to make the candidate for confession free from the fear of Ecclesial shame or ignominy or social stigma. If a priest behaves contrarily he can be subjected to the severest of the punishments, prescribed on this score, by the Canon Law.

5. Sins are forgiven by the priest not because of any merit or authority inherent in them.

*Ref:* Acts. 3:13. When Peter saw the people he said to them, "Fellow, Israelites, why are you surprised at this and why do you stare at us? Do you think that it was by means of our own power or godliness that we made this man walk?" (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

It is reiterated that the authority of the priest to grant remission



of sins is not personal but vicarious or in the capacity as he represents Jesus. In other words, it is a right that he obtains through ordination. The implication here is that the principal actor in the remission of sins is Jesus Himself.

6. It is rather due to the moral instruction of the priest to the sinners;

*Ref:* Jas. 5:19, 20. My brothers if one of you wanders away from the truth and another one brings him back again remember this: whoever turns a sinner back from his wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

It is said again that remission of sins is effected also on the basis of the moral and ethical instructions imparted to the confessing souls. In their instructions the priests shall not create scare among the confessing faithful. The priests, rather, must handle every case with the milk of human kindness and even handed justice.

7. Their prayers,

*Ref.:* 1Tim 2:1. First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, requests and thanks-giving be offered to God for all people. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The duties of the priests do not end with the formal confession ceremony. The priests have to intercede for the erred souls individually and generally as occasion warrants.

8. And due to the grace they have received from Lord Jesus. If the raising of the dead woman to life by St. Peter is attributed to him without considering that Jesus worked through Peter, the assertion that the priest brings out the remission of sins through confession is not at all erroneous. More over, as the priests do so in accordance with the decree of Jesus that, 'if you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven', there is nothing blasphemous in saying that the priests brought it out.

- Ref.:* (a) Jn. 20: 22, 23. Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (G.N.B.)
- (b) 1Tim. 4:14. Do not neglect the spiritual gift that is in you, which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the elders laid their hands on you. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

As the priests are effecting confessions in the true capacity as the Vicars of Jesus, there is no irregularity or anomaly and much less blasphemy in stating that the priests themselves have brought out the remission. It is after all, a euphemistic or courteous way of confiding an apparent event.

## Theme No: 9

# On the Holy Oil

1. Through baptism we put on Christ.

*Ref.:* Gal. 3:27. And when you were baptised, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

One of the effects of baptism is that through the ceremony we put on Christ. For St. Paul the imagery of 'putting on Christ' was a favorite one. It is by likening baptism to bathing in water that this imagery is drawn. As we put on clothes after a bath so do we wear Christ after baptism.

2. We are born again not only from water but from the Holy Spirit also.

*Ref.:* Jn. 3:5. I tell you for certain that before you can get into God's kingdom, you must be born not only by water but by spirit. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

Baptism, however, is not a watery bath only. It is also a rebirth in the Holy Spirit. The symbol of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal ceremony is the Holy Myron; the Holy Oil is the cleansing medium. It signifies exorcism.

3. As it is a must that one be rubbed with oil and led to eternal life by sealing, it is essential that a believer ought be anointed by Holy Myron and consecrated oil.

*Ref.:* Eph. 1:13... You believed in Christ and God put his stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

In order to obtain eternal life we must receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. For this, the Holy Myron which represent the Holy Spirit is to be rubbed, as specified, on the body of the baptismal candidate.



4. The Holy Myron sanctified exclusively by the Supreme Pontiff is being used not only in baptism but also in the consecration of churches and the altar stones. Likewise, consecrated olive oil is being used in baptism. The significance of these two is the following - We profess that thereby we are born anew, are clothed by Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Again, by rubbing with Holy Myron and oil we practise what we profess, viz. we put on Christ and receive the Holy Spirit - In the administration of these oils, the benefits accrued are of spiritual nature. In order that we become endowed with their best results, we must use them with devotion and faith.

- Ref.* (a) Ex. 30:22-24. The Lord said to Moses: Take the finest spices - 6 kg of liquid myrrh, 3 kg of sweet smelling cinnamon, 3 kg of sweet smelling cane and 6 kg of cassia... Add four litres of olive oil and make a sacred anointing oil like perfume. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Songs. 3:6. What is this, coming from the desert like a column of smoke, fragrant with incense sold by the traders! (G.N.B.)
- (c) 1Jn. 2:27. But as for you Christ has poured out the Spirit on you. As long as his Spirit remains in you, you do not need anyone to teach you. For, this Spirit teaches you about everything and what he teaches is true, not false. Obey the Spirit's teaching then and remain in union with Christ. (G.N.B.)

### Comment

As per the canons of the S.O.C., the sanctification of the Holy Myron and the Consecration of the Holy Oil are the exclusive prerogatives or privileges of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, or his nominee. In other words this right vests with the supreme head of the Universal or Provincial Churches. The effects of the use of these two oils are detailed here. It is specifically emphasised that to reap the best results of the anointment, the candidate or the Ecclesia, as the case may be, should have true devotion and faith on the efficacy of administering these media.

## Theme No: 10

# On the Holy Orders

1. Persons called to Holy Orders are to be the guides, to transform people of earthly temperament into people of heavenly disposition and to change those of beastly character into godly nature.

*Ref.* Tit. 2:12. That, grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly passions and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this world. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The attendant functions of those called to the Holy orders or priesthood are summarily discussed. The priests must effect changes in the character of their sheep. In other words the priests shall do every thing possible to change the attitude of their flock from worldly to spiritual. This is accomplished mainly by their holy disposition and blemishless life style.

2. They are to be the ambassadors of the invisible Lord.

*Ref.* 2Cor. 5:20. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (K.J.V.)

### *Comment*

Wherever the priests are, they must be the carriers of Christ. To put it differently, the priests must be the envoys of the Christian message. In that role, the priests must be true witnesses of the Christ-events and spread the Gospel or the good news about Christ with the genuine missionary fervour and zeal.

3. The priests have to minister the holy sacraments entrusted with the Church.

*Ref.* Acts 6:4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry. (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

The priests must celebrate the Eucharist or participate in its celebration on all days fixed by the Canons of the Church, provided, however, that the priests need not do so if they are physically indisposed or otherwise unable on bonafide reasons. In fact, celebrating the Eucharist, which is the fundamental sacrament of the Ecclesia, is the basic function of the priest. The assembly of the believers or the faithful receives the grace of the Eucharist through its celebration by the priests. So the Ecclesia looks to the priests as the genuine representatives of God.

4. One cannot by his own volition or choice attain this grace of priesthood.

*Ref.* Heb. 5:4. No one chooses for himself the honour of being a high priest. It is only by God's calling that, a man is made a high priest just as Aaron was. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

No one can become a priest by his desire or option; nor can he become so by somebody else's persuasion. For, it is not a profession. It is rather a vocation or calling by the grace of God. A priest is called but not made.

5. It comes to be vested only on those chosen by the will of God, and who receive due consecration from the high priest, who is deemed to have been ordained by Jesus himself through the channel of apostolic succession.

*Ref.* (a) 1Tim. 4:14. Use the gift you were given when the prophets spoke and the group of Church leaders blessed you by placing their hands on you. (L.B.)

(b) Acts 12:23. At once an angel from the Lord struck him down because he took the honour that belonged to God. (L.B.)

(c) Jn. 20:22, 23. Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven but if you don't forgive their sins they will not be forgiven". (L.B.)



- (d) 2 Tim. 2:2 ... Now I want you to tell the same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others. (L.B.)
- (e) Tit. 1:5. I left you in Crete to do what had been left undone and to appoint leaders for the churches in each town. (L.B.)

*Comment*

Motivated by the divine calling, one must submit himself before the High Priest to get ordained, in the Apostolic manner. The usage of 'himself' is because the S.O.C. does not permit the women folk to receive the Holy Orders at present. Unless the High Priest physically lays on His hands over the candidate the latter cannot be deemed to have been consecrated to the Holy Orders. The S.O.C. insists on the unbroken and effective succession of Her ministers. For, She believes in the principle of Apostolic succession starting from Jesus and which is passed on through the Apostolic College headed by St. Peter, as a characteristic feature of the Ecclesia. In fact the Apostolicity is one of the four marks or notae of the Church. Apostolic succession is not only a spiritual principle but a hierarchical concept also. The whole Ecclesial or Church History can be summarily put as an attempt to preserve Apostolic succession in tact and without defect or blemish.

6. No one can preach publicly or minister in the Church without having valid apostolic succession and sanction from proper authorities. The supreme sacerdotal authority of the Church vests with His Holiness Ignatius, the Patriarch of the See of Antioch.

*Ref.* Jer. 23:21, 22. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words then they should have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

Valid Apostolic succession and sanction from the proper

authorities are required for a person to preach or perform Ecclesial functions. As for the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, in whose diptych the name of His Holiness Ignatius, the Patriarch of Antioch is mentioned as the Supreme Head and for whom prayers are said, the pontifical authority is vested with the incumbent of the See of St. Peter in Antioch. This provision is as per the Canon Law. No individual or Church or group of Churches or sect has the right to amend this provision unilaterally. If any one contravenes this provision, that is uncanonical and will not have any legal validity as far as the Universal Church is concerned.

7. No one is justified in abstaining himself or herself from the sacraments celebrated by a priest of unsavoury reputation or to cast doubts regarding the efficacy of such actions. Unless excommunicated or anathematised by his superiors or the synod, no clergyman can be prevented from discharging his priestly duties.

*Ref.* (a) Mt. 23: 2, 3. "The Teachers of the Law and Pharisees are the authorised interpreters of Moses' Law. So, you must obey and follow everything they tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because, they don't practise what they preach. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The lay faithful are instructed here, not to keep away from attending the celebration of the Eucharist by a priest of ill repute. Similarly it is pointed out that there is no ground or basis for suspecting the efficacy of the Eucharistic celebration by such a priest. The reason is that unless a priest is disqualified by Ecclesial authority, there is nothing, that prevents him from discharging his priestly duties.

8. As the priests are duly anointed and the sacraments are administered in the name of Jesus Christ and as the fruits of the sacraments are independent of the character of the priest, those who participate with a pure heart and faith in the celebration of

the sacraments by any priest, shall reap the proper results of the sacraments. But divine judgement shall be incurred by the priests who minister the sacraments without proper preparation and faith.

- Ref:* (a) Lev. 21:12. Neither shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. (K.J.V.)
- (b) Mt. 17: 22, 23. When judgement day comes many will say to me, "Lord, Lord! In your name, we spoke God's message, by your name we drew out many demons and performed many miracles." Then I will say to them, "I never knew you. Get away from me you wicked people!" (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Again, it is stated, that the spiritual results of the Eucharistic celebration by a duly ordained priest are independent of his moral character. In other words, his personal character or lifestyle has no bearing on his Eucharistic celebration or of any other sacraments or the performance of priestly functions. The remark of St. Chrysostom or Ivanios, the golden tongued, can be recalled here to provide an answer to the question why so. He wrote 'The priests' function is simply to open his mouth and it is God who accomplishes what is done.' St. Augustine in a classic statement opined that a sacrament will be valid whether Peter celebrated or Judas offered it, provided each of them had the sanction from Jesus. The underlying theory of the belief and practice of the S.O.C. regarding the efficacy of a sacrament celebrated by a priest can be understood by the doctrine known '*Ex opere operato*'. It means that no sacrament is rendered invalid on the ground that the priest who administers it is unfit.

9. But those clerics found offenders shall be excommunicated, and forbidden from administering any rite. The faithful are precluded from participating in the sacraments performed by such priests who do so without any qualm, after they are excommunicated.



- Ref:* (a) Mt. 18:17. If the follower refuses to listen to them, report the matter to the Church. Anyone who refuses to listen to the Church must be treated like an unbeliever or a tax collector. (L.B.)
- (b) vide 1Cor. 5:11. (L.B.)

*Comment*

But as a measure of practical caution, the lay faithful are warned not to participate in the sacrament celebrated by an excommunicated priest. The reason is the following. If a priest, who is excommunicated, performs his ecclesial duties, he incurs the judgment of the Ecclesia. In other words, the sacraments performed by the excommunicated are not valid.

Theme No: 11  
**On the Holy Matrimony**

*Introduction*

Matrimony or marriage is the holy sacrament of the indissoluble spiritual union of man and woman and through which, they and their progeny receive grace and blessings from God.

*Comment*

Matrimony is the sacrament by which humans co-operate with God in His act of creation. That is why it is said, that it is through this sacrament that the progeny gets the grace from God. The decree of Jesus, 'whom God hath joined, man shall not render asunder' is sufficient proof about the solemnity, unity and indissolubility of marriage. Jesus overruled the Jewish practice of approving divorce. This can be understood from his utterance, that once the marriage is solemnized the spouses become one. St Paul elucidated the sacramental aspect of marriage. He, in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to Ephesians, emphasises this aspect.

1. Marriage is good.

*Ref:* Heb. 13:4. Marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers, God will judge. (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

This contention is so because it is in accordance with Nature and her laws. Psychologists are of opinion that marriage gives opportunity to give vent to the sexual desires, which are deep rooted in humans. Further they say, that marriage keeps up the mental poise to a considerable extent. Yet another advantage of marriage is that it fosters the family, which is the forum for faith-building especially in children.

2. Nobody shall be forbidden from entering into the holy wedlock.

*Ref:* 1Tim. 4:3. Such people teach that it is wrong to marry and eat certain foods. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

As marriage is a natural and necessary device, the Church on Her own accord does not forbid anybody from marrying a person of his or her choice, subject of course to canonical sanction. The undertaking of the vow of monastic orders or chastity is left to the absolute option of the candidate concerned. Will, and not force of any sort is the basis of celibate life. So in the early period of the Church even the prelates were allowed to marry. As for instance Gregory, one of the Cappodocian Fathers was a family man. Celibacy was made a requirement for the bishops only subsequently; to be more exact, with the emergence of monasticism.

3. No man is justified in marrying another woman while his wife is alive, or divorcing his wife except for reasons specified in the Hudaya Canon or entering into wedlock with a woman who according to the Canon is in the prohibited degree for marriage.

*Ref:* Mt. 19:4-9. Jesus answered, "Haven't you read the scripture that says that in the beginning the Creator made people male and female? And God said, 'for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife and the two will become one...'. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

This contention is made as a result of the reckoning of the signs of human nature. Accordingly the attendant conditions for marriage are laid down. The first is that, while the spouse is alive, no person shall marry unless canonical divorce is effected. Secondly the S.O.C. does not permit a person to marry another person of the prohibited degree. This is computed by considering the remoteness to the proposed spouse by four degrees or generations in the male line and



three in the female line. Also, marriage must be solemnized as per the provisions of the Canon Law.

4. Marriage is not only a contract;

*Ref:* Rom. 7:2. A married woman, for example, is bound by the Law to her husband as long as he lives; but if he dies, then she is free from the Law that bound her to him. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Had marriage been a contract as in some other communities the Church would have allowed it to be revoked or dissolved with or without any condition. Even while the Church permits separation, it cannot be taken as revocation or dissolution of the marriage. It is rather a permission given for the spouses to separate themselves from the wedlock, as the first marriage was found invalid due to some defect. In other words, there is no canonical divorce but only separation. However, the separated ones are eligible for subsequent marriages. It must be noted here that the civil divorce is not recognized as per the Canon of the Church. All these provisions, in short, point to the fact that marriage cannot be dissolved at will because of its sacramental nature and so marriage can be broken only in accordance with the provisions of the Canon of the S.O.C.

5. But a sacrament also. For this reason and on account of the fact that the betrothal and the union of the bride and the bridegroom into one body are the workings of God, the sacrament of marriage cannot be solemnised except by the priest who is the vicar of God.

*Ref:* (a) Mt. 19:6. Then they are no longer two people but one. And no one should separate a couple that God has joined together. (L.B.)

(b) Prov. 19:14. But a sensible wife is a gift from the Lord. (L.B.)

*Comment*

It is reiterated that marriage is a sacrament for the S.O.C. The S.O.C. insists that all marriages are solemnised by a priest and that they must be done so, in a church and not at a private quarter. These clauses are laid down because of the sacramental nature of the matrimony. It is well to remember that the spirit of the words of Jesus would mean that man and woman can be united in the wedlock only by God acting through the vicar of God or by another priest deputed by the vicar.

## Theme No: 12

# On the Anointing of the Sick

1. It is essential that each one prays for another.

*Ref:* (a) Jas. 5:16... Pray for one another. (G.N.B.)

(b) Thes. 1:2. We thank God for you and always mention you in our prayer. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

Prayer is a bond of communion with God and fraternity with the community. The efficacy of the prayer is so great that each one has to pray for everyone else. As the saints testify, no prayer goes unheard and unanswered if it is good holistically for the solicitor. However, nobody can vouch for the day on which the prayers will be answered. That is why Lord Jesus exhorted to go on praying, without getting disgusted.

2. And shares the burden.

*Ref:* Gal. 6:2. Help to carry one another's burden and in this way you will obey the law of Christ. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Each one should share willingly according to his or her ability, the burden of others. This is the legacy of true Christian love and the basis of service ministries of the Church. After all, everyone must remember that Christian life fundamentally is not individualistic but corporate. It is a life, where the principle is each for all and all for each. This verily is the Christian character, which moves the heart if not the head also. In a way, this is the '*elan vital*' or vital energy for human life.

3. Also offer special prayers for those who are sick. The priests shall give spiritual strength to the physically indisposed by providing good counsels praying for their mental cum physical well-being and in the name of our Lord anoint them with the



holy oil. The anointing of the body of the sick with this oil which sanctifies and so is hailed the oil of grace, is for not only giving strength to attain victory over satanic temptations that may be set at the time of death but also for strengthening the sick to abandon worldly desires and to reinforce them that they are rubbed with the holy oil, representing the grace of our Lord. Further, it not only works out remission of sins but also brings about cure of illness, if the Lord so wills.

- Ref:* (a) Jas. 5: 14, 15. If you are sick ask the church priest to come and pray for you. Ask them to put olive oil on you in the name of the Lord. If you have faith when you pray for sick people, they will get well. The Lord will heal them and if they have sinned he will forgive them. (L.B.)
- (b) Mk. 6:13. They forced out many demons and healed a lot of sick people by putting olive oil on them. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The preliminaries of anointing, on the sick and effects of doing so are explained here. While anointing, the priests should try to fortify the sick, through their pieces of advice to fight against satanic temptations and worldly ties. In doing so, the priest shall tell the sick that through the oil that is being rubbed, they receive the grace of the spirit of God. The theology is that the holy oil is a symbol of divine grace. The oil is used not only for the remission of sins but also as a medicine for curing the illness. Therefore, anointing the oil on the sick can be performed as and when needed. In other words, unlike baptism, it is not a one time ritual.

## Theme No: 13

### On Burial

1. In accordance with the good or bad actions performed by one through the mortal body while alive, every person will undergo pain and pleasure in the different kind of body that everybody puts on after resurrection. Therefore it is improper and unbecoming to bury the corpses of humans without performing rituals and saying prayers as in the case of animals.

*Ref:* (a) 1Cor. 15:53. For, what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die. (G.N.B.)

- (b) 2Cor. 5:10. For all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him. Each one will receive what he deserves, according to everything he has done, good or bad in his bodily life. (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

The logic of according a decent burial is brought out. As the retributions of the actions done while alive has to be suffered, as St. Paul says, in the new type of body to be formed out of the mortal body, the latter is to be preserved and honoured without blemish; also it must be buried without any sort of maiming.

2. But as we do have the hope of resurrection,

*Ref:* 1Thes. 4:13. Our brothers we want you to know the truth about those who have died, so that you will not be sad as are those who have no hope. (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

The rationale for an honourable burial is further expatiated. According to Pauline theology, resurrection implies, resurrection in the new body formed out of the original mortal body. Hence the dead body must be buried without inflicting wounds or any type of distortion on it, except those necessary for maintaining life.

3. Bishops, Priests, Monks, Laypersons, et. al. must be buried in accordance with their status and decrees of the Church. The burial must be performed with due devotion and care. Even if the children of Christians happen to depart from this world without receiving the grace of baptism, they must be buried with proper prayers and due rituals, considering that they are the offsprings of the faithful.

- Ref:* (a) Ecc. 6:3. A man may have a hundred children and live a long time but no matter how long he lives, if he does not get his share of happiness and does not receive a decent burial, then I say that a baby born dead is better off. (G.N.B.)
- (b) 2Sam. 2:5. "May the Lord bless you for showing your loyalty to your king by burying him". (G.N.B.)
- (c) vide Acts. 8:2. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Each person must be buried in accordance with the ecclesial status and with due respect. It implies that there can be differences in the rituals of the burial services of the bishops, priests, the religious and the ordinary lay persons. Regarding the burial of the unbaptised children of Christian parents, the S.O.C. is certain and definite that they must also be accorded a decent Christian burial. This insistence seems to be based on ecclesial expediency and discipline.



## Theme No: 14

# On Prayer

### *Introduction*

Prayer signifies the communion of the humans with God, the Creator. This communion is established when they realise their duty to God and the measure of the bounties they have received from Him. Through this exercise men and women receive grace and blessings from God and solicit from Him what all are required for the development and onward growth of their souls and bodies. Prayers formulated by various Holy Fathers befitting the various hours, days, seasons besides considering the disposition of the faithful flock in general and such prayers which are accepted and prescribed by the Church are generally called public ones. Whereas private prayers are the ones which are said by each one of the faithful personally, by way of thanks giving for all the bounties received from the Lord and as petitions for their worldly and spiritual needs.

### *Comment*

Prayer is not petitioning. It is in reality communion or interaction with the Creator. The examples of the Blessed Virgin and of the mother of Samuel, the Prophet, praying in the temple are models for us to imitate. So also is the classic prayer of St. Augustine. He prayed: *O! Lord, let me know myself, so that I may know thee.* This feeling of communion arises when a person acknowledges his or her dependence on the Creator. In prayer pure and simple, one becomes meek. It is because a person realizes that, the blessings enjoyed are the bounties or gifts of God and not out of his or her own merit. There won't be any grudge or grumbling or discontentment for such a one on any unfulfilled prayer. Prayer for a true meek person is the praise of God. The remark of Evagrius of *Pontus* that the theologian is he who prays has become acceptable to the theological world. For

a person of prayer, everything would be seen as a manifestation of God's working or flowing out of the infinitesimal wisdom of God. For St. Ephrem, the flight of a dove was a reminder of the Cross of Jesus. As St. Thomas A Kempis, the author of the classical devotional book *'On the Imitation of Christ'*, writes, a man of prayer would pray as follows: *'If it is thy will to lead me to light, blessed art thou O! Lord; If it is thy will to keep me in darkness, yet, ye be blessed again'*. We must mainly pray for spiritual fortification. In prayer we must offer thanks for all that we have received. There is no harm in praying for our material needs, for our sustenance as well. That is why Jesus, in his teaching about prayer sought the daily bread. No wonder the prayers formulated by the Syrian Fathers for the seven hours of the day and seasons of the year which are the periods of Annunciation - Nativity, Epiphany, Lent, Resurrection, Apostles, Growth of the Church, Elijah-Cross-Moses and dedication of the Church are modelled after the Lord's prayer. The S.O.C. distinguishes between public and private prayers. The former are those that are liturgically said by the congregation as a whole in the Church; the latter are prayers said personally. The S.O.C. says that even in private prayer the thrust be on the spiritual aspect.

1. Both these types of prayers are to be said with devotion and faith.

*Ref:* Jas. 1:6, 7, 8. But when you pray, you must believe and not doubt at all. Whoever doubts is like a wave in the sea, that is driven and blown about by the wind. A person like that, unable to make up his mind and undecided in all he does, must not think that he will receive anything from the Lord. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Public and private prayers are to be said with meekness, devotion and acknowledging the greatness of God. For such prayers are heard quickly by the Lord. The reading of the Sermon on the Mount would convince us of the need for

humbleness and purity of heart. Be thou innocent as the new-born babe, is a fitting direction for prayer.

2. Public prayers generally are to be held in churches. If not possible, in houses. It is extremely good and highly commendable, that all those who can, shall assemble and say the prayers together.

*Ref:* (a) Acts. 3:1. One day Peter and John went to the temple at three O'Clock in the afternoon, the hour for prayer. (G.N.B.)

(b) Mt. 18:20. For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Instructions regarding public prayers are given. As far as possible public or liturgical prayers are to be held in churches. If not possible, they are to be held in house congregations. The theology for congregational prayers is the saying of our Lord, that when two or more assemble in His name, He would be in their midst.

3. As decreed by our Lord, prescribed by the Canon Law and permitted by Church practices, prayers are to be said standing with intermittent genuflection as signs of worship. This is what is to be followed generally. Prayers of Confession, Holy Orders and Pentecost etc., however are to be held to the regular accompaniment of genuflection; but genuflection is prohibited on Sundays, feast days and on days intervening Easter Sunday and the Day of the Pentecost.

*Ref:* (a) Mk. 11:25. And when you stand and pray forgive anything you may have against anyone so that your father in heaven will forgive the wrongs that you have done. (G.N.B.)

(b) Lk. 18: 10-13. "Once there were two men, who went up to the temple to pray: one was a pharisee, the other a tax collector. The pharisee stood apart and prayed... I fast two days a week and I give you a tenth of all my income". (G.N.B.)



*Comment*

The prayers are to be said by the able bodied in the standing pose; with kneeling down or genuflexion, which is a reminder of the crucifixion and a symbol for venerating crucified Christ. Besides it is an exercise of penitence, rogation or repentance. The S.O.C., however, prohibits genuflexion on all Sundays and the fifty days between Easter Day and the Day of Pentecost. The theology is that on these days more than the sorrow of crucifixion the Church rejoices in the resurrection of Her Master. In short, instead of rogation, rejoicing is the distinguishing mark of these days.

## Theme No: 15

### On Fasts

#### *Introduction*

Fast was the initial decree enjoined by the Lord,

#### 1. On Adam.

*Ref:* Gen. 2:17. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for, in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (K.J.V.)

#### *Comment*

Fasting is apparently the abstinence from food completely or partially or from certain types of food. Of all the divine or dominical decrees to mankind, the instruction to Adam for fasting was the first one. In the Garden of Eden, the first place of habitation, God's forbidding decree to keep away from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge was pronounced. In this context it may be construed that the Lord as the greatest dietician, knew that certain prohibitions in the food habit are necessary for the good health of His creation. Realising the implication of the divine decree, the Church as a true mother prescribes periodical fasts to make her children not only physically strong but also spiritually fit.

#### 2. It was observed by the Jewish community, as per the commandment of the Lord.

*Ref:* (a) Joel 2:12. Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning. (K.J.V.)

(b) Zech. 7:5. Tell the people of the land and the priest that when they fasted and mourned in the fifth and the seventh month during these seventy years... (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

As per Mosaic Law, the Jews were forbidden from eating

certain fishes and flesh. During the Passover the Israelites were to keep away from eating leavened bread. Elijah, the great Jewish prophet observed fast for forty days. Joshua, *the son of Nun*, was able to keep the celestial bodies still, by the power he gained through prayer and fasting.

3. Was ordered, practised and taught by our Lord.

*Ref:* (a) Mt. 4:2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. (K.J.V.)

(b) Mt. 9:15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then shall they fast. (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

Even Jesus our Lord observed fast for forty days. It was the spiritual strength that He gained from this fast, which fortified Him to have decisive victory over the seductive strategy of Satan. In His teachings, Jesus further emphasised that one could cast off the evil spirits with the power of prayer and fasting.

4. And was observed by the Apostles and accordingly confirmed, ordered and practised by the Church as part of Her discipline.

*Ref:* Acts. 13:2. While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart for me, Barnabas and Saul, to do the work to which I have called them". (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

From the book of *Praxis* or *The Acts of the Apostles*, it can be gathered that the Holy Apostles also observed fast like their Master. One of the sources of their spiritual strength was fasting. In line with the Apostolic tradition and with the lessons that She learned from the Semitic cradle of training, the S.O.C. vouches on the efficacy of fasting and the inexorable value of it, in spiritual life.



5. But physical or bodily fasting without spiritual abstinence from evil is not enough at all.

*Ref:* (a) Mt. 6:16. "And when you fast do not put on a sad face, as the hypocrites do, they neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. (G.N.B.)

(b) vide. Is. 58:77

(c) vide. Num. 7:7

### *Comment*

Abstinence from food alone, without spiritual nourishments, like prayer and meditation will emaciate both the body and the soul equally. On the contrary physical abstinence from food coupled with spiritual exercises would fortify the person observing fast.

6. The intentions of fasting are the following: To instruct to value more of matters spiritual than worldly, to subdue bodily temptations and foster the soul, to defend the soul from bodily desires and to awaken and orient it to things divine. And to be a weapon to have victory over Satan. As love of the stomach is the mother of many a sin, abstaining oneself from food is a way to prevent the evil arising from consuming food.

*Ref:* (a) Phil. 3:19...They worship their stomach and brag about the disgusting things they do. (L.B.)

(b) Mt. 17:21. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (K.J.V.)

### *Comment*

The purposes or intentions and the merits of fasting are brought out here. Fasting, on the whole, brings in spiritual orientation and equilibrium besides victory over carnal desires. In the prayers of the S.O.C. it is extolled that observance of fasting is a sure device to gain victory over Satan and his primrose ways, which lead to eternal damnation. Fasting uplifts a person from the terrestrial realm to the celestial plane.

7. The Church has therefore decreed the observance of fasting on all Wednesdays and Fridays besides during the following five periods. Lent, period of Annunciation and Nativity, the feast of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, feast of the Apostles, Nineveh fast or fast of Rogation.

*Ref:* Lk. 18:12. "I fast two days a week..." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The Church has specified five periods of fast noted already, in the course of an Ecclesial year. Besides them, all the Wednesdays and Fridays except during the weeks between the Easter and the Pentecost are to be observed as days of fast. Wednesdays in honour of the Blessed Virgin and Fridays in remembrance of the Crucifixion of our Saviour.

8. During fast days abstinence from marital relationship, consuming of meat, fish etc. is obligatory. Also, in accordance with one's physical capacity and the ordinances of the Church, keeping away from meals till noon or having only one time food a day is also to be observed.

*Ref:* (a) 1Cor. 7:5... You agree not to have sex... (L.B.)  
 (b) 2Sam. 1:12. They cried all day long and would not eat anything... (L.B.)  
 (c) Dan. 1:8. Daniel made up his mind to eat and drink only what God had approved his people to eat. And he asked the king's chief official for permission not to eat the food and wine served in the royal palace. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The disciplines to be observed during the fast days are here detailed. They are all conducive for the spiritual growth and strength.

## Theme No: 16

# On Sundays and Feast or Obligatory Days

1. The holy Apostles and Church Fathers have ruled that we celebrate with due honour and devotion, Sundays as memorial days of the resurrection of our Lord, His miracles and consecration of the Church. Likewise the faithful must observe the feast days fixed by the Church as commemorative ones of His birth, baptism, and He being presented in the temple. The faithful must on these days, keep away from worldly activities and involve themselves in spiritual pursuits like the participation in the holy Eucharistic celebration, reading of the Scriptural texts, singing of the divine hymns etc.

*Ref:* (a) 1Cor. 11:20. When you assemble you seem to learn and eat not befitting the day of our Lord. (V.G.)  
(b) Acts. 20:7-10. On Saturday evening we gathered together for the fellowship meal. Paul spoke to the people and kept on speaking until midnight, since he was going to leave the next day... (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The Church has prescribed the observance of every Sunday as Lord's Day. Similarly certain days are earmarked as specially sanctified ones. Both these categories of days glorify Christ-events from Annunciation to Ascension. The Church has made obligatory the observance of the fast days with the true Christian mood and religious sentiment cum spirit.

2. These sacred days must be observed in the true Christian manner and not in the Jewish or pagan way. Nor shall the faithful while away time idling without observing them devotionally.

*Ref:* (a) 1Cor. 5:8. Let us celebrate our Passover, then, not with bread having the old yeast of sin and wickedness but with the yeast of purity and holiness. (V.G.)  
(b) vide. Col. 2:16, 7



*Comment*

It is repeated that indulging in the pleasant ways of the world on these obligatory days is forbidden by the Ecclesia. If the number of fasting and obligatory days put together is greater than the other days in an year as per the calendar of the S.O.C. it is all because of the benefits that they would bring towards a spiritual life. Mere external observation of fasting like the Pharisees of the Jews and the Pagans do is not enough. The spirit of fasting must be interiorised to facilitate the fruits of spirituality to come forth.

**Theme No: 17**  
**On the Feast of the Saints**

1. It is proper and befitting to celebrate the feast of the Blessed Virgin, Apostles, Martyrs, Saints and Saintesses.

- Ref:*
- (a) Judg. 11:40. That is why every year Israelite girls walk around for four days remembering Jephthah's daughter. (L.B.)
  - (b) Ps. 112:6. A good person will never fail; he will always be remembered. (G.N..B)
  - (c) Mt. 23:29... You make fine tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of those who lived good lives. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Lk. 1:48. For he has remembered me, his lovely servant. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The S.O.C. venerates the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Apostles, Saintly Martyrs and Venerable Saints, all of whom by their exemplary life enlightened our lives also. The Church values very much their intercessory prayers. In the liturgy of the S.O.C. this fact is testified. Accordingly, great honour is accorded to them and solicitation of their prayers is besought.

2. Commemoration of such just and holy men will be blessings for the faithful and their prayers will be bounties to the believers. Although, not obligatory to keep away from worldly works unlike on the feast days it is essential that the faithful participate in the Eucharistic liturgy and offer special prayers etc. on such days.

- Ref:* Prov. 10:7. The memory of the just is blessed... (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

The discipline to be followed on the feast days of the saints is prescribed. All these feast days are to be celebrated with devotion and prayer. Indulgence in worldly works is tabooed.

The theology is that frequent getting off from worldly works is conducive to a life of inner purity and internal serenity.

3. The faithful shall, besides, reflect on the acts and steadfastness of the saint whose feast is being celebrated and try to follow his foot-steps.

*Ref:* (a) Heb. 6:12 ...you would be following the example of those who had faith and were patient until God kept his promise to them. (L.B.)

- (b) Heb. 13:7. Remember your former leaders who spoke God's message to you. Think back on how they lived and died and imitate their faith. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This is an additional discipline to the ones prescribed above. When the feast of a particular saint is celebrated, it is quite behoving that, the life style of that saint and his ways of fighting Satan are impressed upon the minds of the faithful. Pilgrimage to the concerned shrines is also helpful to build up a spiritual disposition among the believers. This latter exercise has an Ecclesial dimension also. It helps develop coherence and consolidation among the faithful. It is not extraneous to mention that all the Jews of the past had to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for celebrating different festivals thrice an year. Along with the rabbinic instruction this exercise also did a lot to maintain the communal integrity of the Jews, even on the face of pogroms perpetrated by Hitler and others.



## Theme No: 18

# On the Mother of God

1. Following the annunciation of the Angel to the Blessed Virgin the Word of God became incarnate in her womb.

*Ref:* Lk. 1:35. The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God’s power will rest upon you; for this reason the Holy Child will be called the Son of God. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

As per Christians, the Annunciation of the angel to the Blessed Virgin is a marvel, both historically as well as theologically. In the former sense it heralds the Christ-events in Salvation History. Theologically it marks the inauguration of the divine dispensation of Incarnation. The humility, self negation and willing co-operation of Mary in the great event of Incarnation are all made manifest through the Annunciation. From the standard of mortal man She could have avoided the ignominy cum social stigma and ostracism consequent to the Virgin birth of Jesus, by a negative answer to the proclamation of the archangel, on the glad tidings of Incarnation. Had it been so, She would not have been the second *Eve*, who ushered in the salvation of mankind. But She lowered herself. Her heart praised the Lord. She was therefore selected by the mighty God for the grand episode of the divine incarnation of Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity.

2. As the divinity and humanity got indissolubly united even while in the womb itself,

*Ref:* vide Ref. 12 of Theme No: 3

### *Comment*

The Word Who incarnated in the womb of Mary was not merely human or exclusively divine. But in the Incarnate Person, both humanity and divinity were united inseparably but without

fusion. The *modus operandi* or the mode of effecting of this union, the S.O.C. opines, is a mystery because it cannot be explained by human logic, despite many a theory. It is in the attempt to unravel this mystery that the Christian Church got split up into sects like, *Miaphysites* as the *Jacobites* and *Dyophysites* like the Byzantines and the Roman Catholics. The Syrian Antiochaeon Patriarch Severius, Bishop Jacob Burdaeus, Philoxinose Mabugg were the notable *Miaphysites* who were mistakenly accused of *Monophysitism*. The councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon witnessed the internecine fights of these sects and the consequent mutual anathema. It is a sorry and sad plight that the wounds so inflicted have not yet been healed. After all, every Christian shall remember that dividing is easy while unification is pretty difficult.

3. As this virgin gave birth to Immanuel, the full God and full man,

*Ref:* Is. 7:14... Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (K.J.V.)

#### *Comment*

The child that Mary gave birth was Immanuel, which in Hebrew means 'God is with us'. This name was given to Lord Jesus in fulfillment of the prophesy of the great Jewish prophet Isaiah, who lived in Jerusalem in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The term Immanuel has the following deep theological connotation. It means the immanence of God as distinct from His transcendence. This immanent Immanuel or Jesus was fully God and fully man simultaneously

4. The Blessed Virgin is hailed Mother of God. Since Her womb became quite suitable to be the throne of the Son of God, and as the Holy Virgin,

*Ref:* Lk. 1:43. Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me? (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

The S.O.C. avows that as the child born of the Blessed Virgin had the full divinity, indissolubly mixed with full humanity in a mysterious manner, She is the Mother of God. This is the

point of distinction from the Nestorians who hail Mary, as the Mother of Jesus but not of God. On account of Her humility and willingness to co-operate with the divine dispensation of Incarnation, God selected Her womb to be His Throne.

5. Never knew man; She remained ever a Virgin.

Ref: (a) Jn. 19:26, 27. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there, so he said to his mother, "He is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "She is your mother." From that time the disciple took her to live in his home. (G.N.B.)

(b) Ezek. 44:1-3. The man led me to the outer gate at the east side of the temple area; the gate was closed and the Lord said to me, "this gate will stay closed and will never be opened. No human being is allowed to use it because I the Lord God of Israel, have entered through it. It is to remain closed..." (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

As St. Mary never knew any man including St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, the S.O.C. asserts that she remained all throughout Her life a Virgin. She is therefore hailed the ever Virgin or technically '*Sompre Virgo*'. She is ever hailed by the S.O.C. as the one filled with divine grace and the Virgin Mother. The latter term sounds paradoxical but for God everything is possible.

6. We shall, in accordance with the annunciation of the Angel give every honour to this Holy Mother and desire of her solicitations for us.

Ref: (a) Lk. 1:28. The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!" (G.N.B.)

(b) Lk. 1:48. For he has remembered me his lovely servant! (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The justification of the honour or *dulia* accorded to Mother Mary is no mere accident. It is, rather in line with the hailing



of the archangel Gabriel. If an archangel can honour Her why should not ordinary mortals do so? Moreover, myriads of men and women vouch on the efficacy of Her intercession. S.O.C., however, is cautious to see that the *dulia* that She accords to the Divine Mother does not verge on *hyperdulia* or over veneration. It is true that the S.O.C. hails St. Mary as the gate of Heaven. But She is not hailed the Lady of Immaculate Conception as the Roman Catholic Church predicates Her.

## Theme No: 19

# On the Prayer to the Saints

1. As the Saints who have departed from the mortal body are still alive in the spirit,

*Ref:* (a) Lk. 20:38. "He is the God of the living, not of the dead, for to him all are alive." (G.N.B.)  
(b) 1 Pet. 3:19. And in his spiritual existence he went and preached to the imprisoned spirits. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Persons who had led a pious and saintly life and have apparently departed from us are still alive. On the authority of the dominical words, deeds, the Bible and Tradition, the S.O.C. contends that such people are alive in spirit. True, they are not visible to mortal eyes. It is because they are spirits without sensory faculties.

2. It is quite befitting that affection and honour are accorded to them in the name of Christ. As they are the loved ones of our Lord, respecting and loving them are like giving the same to Him.

*Ref:* Mt. 10:40, 41. "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

As the saints are still alive, of course, in the spiritual plane and as they have won the love of Christ, it is only fit that, we revere them and commemorate their feasts; on the basis of the utterance of Jesus, that whatever has been done to His servant will be deemed as a service to He Himself. So, what we do to the saints are offerings to Him.

3. As the prayer offered by the children of the ancient Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David in grateful memory of them, was heard and answered by God, so our prayers beseeching

mercy and offered in remembrance of those saints who had shed their life blood for Christ and who had begotten us in spirit and had shown the path of life, is good and would be acceptable to God.

- Ref:* (a) Deut. 9:27. Remember your servants, Abraham, Issac and Jacob and do not pay any attention to the stubbornness, wickedness and sin of this people. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Is. 37:35. I will defend this city and protect it for the sake of my own honour and because of the promise I made to my servant David. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This is an exhortation to us, the living ones, to invoke the intercession of the departed saints, who while alive, trod along the way of life that Jesus had shown. The logic is the following. Such saints like our spiritual fathers act as our guides along the spiritual path. They are, in other words, the signposts in our odyssey to the heavenly Jerusalem; again on account of the easy access they have to Jesus, it is natural to contend that the saints can intercede for us.

4. As death simply signifies the separation of the body and the soul and not the annihilation of the soul as such,

- Ref:* (a) Ps. 13:4. Don't let my enemies say "We have defeated him" Don't let them gloat over my downfall. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Ecc. 12:7. Our bodies will return to the dust of the earth, and the breath of life will go back to God, who gave it to us. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Jn. 8:5, I am telling you the truth: whoever obeys my teaching will never die. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The theology of the S.O.C. regarding the phenomenon of death is clearly brought out. Death of course is the end of what we see or experience through the senses. This



happenens because of the separation of the soul from its temple, the body with the senses, which the soul had obtained at the time of birth. But the soul is not sensory. Therefore it will continue to exist even after death. In other words, the eschatological aspect of the soul is explained. It is immortal, it lives on, awaiting the *Parousia* or the second coming of Christ.

5. Since the saints have the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by God to them as a pledge,

*Ref:* Jn. 14:16. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, who will stay with you forever.  
(G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Here we get the conception of the S.O.C. regarding the relation of the saints to God. They are endowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit. This endowment is a pledge. A pledge, in the ordinary business of life, is a surety of what will be transacted in the future. So is this grace. It is an indication as to what the saints would inherit in the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, intercessory prayers to the saints will facilitate our being led to the Kingdom through the prayers of the saints.

6. As they are dwelling in the place of bliss,

*Ref:* (a) Lk. 23:43. Jesus said to him, "I promise you that today you will be in paradise with me." (G.N.B.)  
(b) Phil. 1:21, 23. If I live, it will be for Christ and if I die, I will gain even more. I don't know what to choose, I could keep on living and doing something useful. It is a hard choice to make. I want to die and be with Christ, because that would be much better. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The saints are enjoying uninterrupted bliss in heaven along with the host of angels and the prophets of the yore.

7. And, as they adore the Lord, like the angels do, as they wish and pray for the redemption of all the people of the world, our solicitations to them to intercede for us will be quite efficacious.

- Ref:*
- (a) Job. 16:19, 20. Also now behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high, my friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God. (K.J.V.)
  - (b) Ps. 30:12. So I will not be silent; I will sing praise to you. Lord you are my God and I will give thanks for ever. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Ps. 115: 17, 18. The Lord is not praised by the dead; by anyone who go down to the world of silence. But we, the living will give thanks to him. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Zech. 1:12. Then the angel said, "Almighty Lord, you have been angry with Jerusalem and the cities of Judah for seventy years now. How much longer will it be before you show the mercy?" (G.N.B.)
  - (e) Lk. 16:9. And Jesus went on to say, "And so I tell you; make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out you will be welcomed in their eternal home." (V.G.)
  - (f) Jer. 31:15... Rachel weeping for her children refuse to be comforted for her children because they were not. (K.J.V.)
  - (g) Judg. 13:17. And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, what is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour (K.J.V.)
  - (h) vide. Jer. 15:4, Mt. 27:46-49. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The logic of intercession is spelt out in the following lines. In their heavenly abode, the saints are, amidst the angels, who are unstained by sin; further they are in perpetual communion with God. This is effected through their praises and adoration of the blessed Trinity. The saints, as they have become selfless, would not be content with heavenly enjoyment to the exclusion of the others on earth. As they

are only very eager to help those souls who suffer on earth, can we not imagine as to how much would they like to respond to those who solicit their intercession?

8. God answers the intercession not only of the saints but also the prayers of the concerned supplicants, after assessing the faith and intention of such ones.

*Ref:* Acts. 5:14-16. But more and more people were added to the group, a crowd of men and women who believed in the Lord. As a result of what the Apostles were doing, sick people were carried out into the streets and placed on heads and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. And crowds of people came in from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing those who were ill or who had evil spirits in them; and they were all healed. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Even while stressing the efficacy of the intercession of the saints, the S.O.C. is not oblivious of the fact that, the prayers by the solicitors themselves would be answered. The Lord, however, would respond only after making an evaluation of the faith and intentions of the seekers. It is worthwhile to remember the comments of Jesus to Satan and the Holy Apostles. To Satan, He said, that the scripture forbade the testing of the Lord; and the Apostles were told that they could not exorcise the demon due to the deficiency of their faith.

9. What all do we do towards the saints deeming them as the friends of Jesus but not his peers or equals are good in themselves and pleasing to the Lord.

*Ref:* Mt. 25:40. The king will reply, "I tell you whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me!" (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The mistaken notion, that when saints are venerated, it amounts to the adoration of them, is allayed. The S.O.C. is



absolutely clear that the saints are only servants of Jesus or at the most, as St. Thomas A Kempis puts it, they are the friends of God. Certainly the saints are not God's peers or equals. They can only be at the most honoured or venerated. Adoration is reserved for God alone. But the Lord would however reckon the veneration that we offer to the saints and would respond to their intercessions.

10. It is through the angels and the spiritual power that God has given them that the spirits of the saints come to know of the happenings of the world and not because they possess omniscience as the Lord has.

*Ref:* (a) 2Sam. 14:20. But he did it in order to straighten out this whole matter. Your majesty is as wise as the angel of God and knows everything that happens. (G.N.B.)

(b) Lk. 15:10. In the same way I tell you the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents. (G.N.B.)

(c) Heb. 12:22, 24. Instead, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, with its thousands of angels. You have come to the joyful gathering of God's first born sons, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, who is the judge of all mankind, and to the spirits of good people made perfect. You have come to Jesus who arranged the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that promises much better things than does the blood of Abel. (G.N.B.)

(d) vide Jer. 31:15. op. cit

### *Comment*

The theology, as to how do the saints come to have the extra-sensory perception is explained. It is through the power which they have come to possess due to their communion with the angels or perhaps as a direct gift of God and not because they enjoy omniscience. Only God has omniscience.

11. It is defaming God and his servants to say that the holy angels and the pure souls of the saints are not endowed with the power

to know matters concerning themselves especially in the back ground that this kind of power which the Devil possessed before the fall was not taken away from him. As praying for each other is a divine decree and as the practice of the dead saints and the living ones praying for each other and for the welfare of the world does not in anyway go against or deny or belittle the mediation of Christ, it does not in any way, deprecate or marginalise the exclusive mediation of Christ for us. For, if such a belittling takes place when saints are solicited to intercede, the same thing happens when the living are besought to pray for another living person. It is extremely difficult to understand the logic in saying that soliciting of the prayer of the living is no denial of the mediatorship of Christ, while doing so through the departed saints amounts to refusal. Further, as praying for each other and to the departed saints have been in vogue from the beginning of the Church, besides being in conformity with the Biblical truths observed among the faithful from antiquity till date and because these practices have been found quite efficacious, it is very behoving and befitting to observe them.

*Ref:* (a) Mt. 4:6. ..."If you are God's Son, throw yourself down for the scripture says, 'God will give orders to his angels about you; they will hold you up with their hands, so that, not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.' (G.N.B.)

(b) vide. Gen. 3:2, Job. 4:7. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

A very logical argument in favour of angels and the saintly souls possessing foreknowledge of themselves and the phenomenal world as distinct from omniscience. Even the devils possess it as they used to enjoy the same before their fall from the angelic status. Then what is the folly in presuming that the angels and the saints also possess that power? Again, we may infer certain things from the dominical decree to carry on mutual prayer. As commented earlier even the departed souls are spiritually alive and pray for the living in the world.

Conversely, they are also getting the benefits from their brethren in the world. This certainly is mutual spiritual mediation. The S.O.C., while encouraging this practice, does not in any way discount the mediation of Jesus to God. If it is argued that by the practice of the mutual spiritual mediation of saints and the faithful, the role of Jesus as the sole mediator is marginalized, the same argument applies while intercessory prayers are offered by the living for the living. Further, as per the testimony of Church Fathers, it may be noted, that praying to the saints has been in vogue since the infancy of the Church.



## Theme No: 20

# On the Prayer for the Departed

1. Our Lord incarnated, fasted, gave himself as a sacrifice, descended to the Sheol, preached to the souls there, was resurrected, ascended to the Heaven, sat at the right hand side of God the Father and offered mediation. All these are for the sake of the whole mankind, from Adam to the last man. He did all these things, is offering mediation for the sake of saving mankind, motivated as He is, by the fullness and perfection of his love towards human beings.

- Ref:*
- (a) Rom. 5:18. So then, as the one sin condemned all mankind, in the same way, the one righteous act sets all mankind free and gives them life.
  - (b) 1Pet. 3:19. And in his spiritual existence he went and preached to the imprisoned spirits.
  - (c) Jn. 17:20 ...I am also praying for everyone else who will have faith because of what my followers will say about me. (L.B.)
  - (d) Lk. 7:14-15. The seeds that fell among the thorn bushes are also people who hear the message. But they are so eager for riches and pleasures that they never produce anything. Those seeds that fell on good ground are the people who listen to the message and keep it in good and honest hearts. They last and produce a harvest. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The purpose of Christ-Events, from Incarnation to Ascension is detailed. It is specified that all this was out of the pure and self-giving love of Jesus towards mankind. The purpose, in short, was the salvation of the entire mankind, from Adam to the last man. The point to be noted here is that, Jesus died and continues His meditation, not only for the living but for the dead as well. After all, the differences of the living and the dead are made by man who is guided by the earthly

time-scale. These conceptions, based on the principles of past, present and future of human beings do not have any meaning for God who exists in the spiritual time transcending human time. In other words, earthly and spiritual times are two different categories and may not coincide.

2. The main subject of Christ-events is for a reconciliation with grace and justice,

*Ref:* 1Pet. 2:24. Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the Cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Salvation history is presented from another angle or perspective. It is to effect reconciliation for the estranged mankind, that Salvation history is unfolded. Following the eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam incurred the estrangement from God's grace for himself and the progeny. Consequently God ousted our first parents from Paradise. This punishment was the outflow of God's Justice. But the compassion and grace of God, exemplified in Jesus, the second Person of Godhead ultimately superseded God's Justice. This is what is seen in the Christ-events with the finale on the Cross. It should not be forgotten that the whole gamut of Christ-events is meant not only for the living but also for the departed. Also it may be noted that the initial justice and the subsequent grace are all subject to the doctrine of *Perichoresis*.

3. And to set a pure and perfect example to all the mankind. Therefore, in compliance with the characteristic of love we should wish and pray for all humans from Adam downwards, as was exemplified by our Saviour.

*Ref:* (a) 1Pet. 2:21. It was to this that God called you, for, Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example so that you would follow in his steps. (G.N.B.)

- (b) Jn. 13:15. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The crucified Christ expects every one to emulate Him. So, His love and prayer for the living as well as the dead are what we, at least, ought to follow. To express in other words, we should pray not only for the living ones but for the departed souls as well. This is true imitation of Christ. Undoubtedly, Christian life, which for all practical purposes and intents is corporate in nature, becomes meaningful only when each one prays for each other, whether living or dead.

4. Considering all humans, from Adam downwards to the last person as constituting His body, Jesus the head looks to the needs and responds to the requests of each one. Likewise, it is necessary that everyone from the first man Adam till the last man shares the burden of everybody else and prays for each other since each one is an organ in the body of Christ. Is it because of the consideration that we would lead a righteous life in the future and hence as a sequel obtain forgiveness of sins that we pray for their remission and those of our brethren? Similarly when we ask for forgiveness of the sins of those sick who are too serious as to deter us from entertaining any hope of their retrieval to normalcy, it is not because that they will lead a righteous life if they come back to active life, that we pray for them. On the other hand, it is a supplication to God, to remit the sins of the sick ones out of His mercy, without considering at all the possibility of the sick surviving. Likewise the prayer for our brethren who are dead is a supplication to God to forgive their sins out of His compassion. The decree of God that the period till the day of judgement is to be deemed as that of grace is not only for the living but also for those who are on the death bed.

*Ref:* (a) Eph. 5:23. ...Christ is the head and saviour of the Church which is his own body. (L.B.)

- (b) Eph. 5:29. None of us hate our own bodies; we



provide for them and take good care of them just as Christ does for the Church. (L.B.)

(c) vide. 1Cor. 12:12-27 & Gal. 6:2. (L.B.)

*Comment*

The need of praying for the departed is elucidated with the help of the organic theory on the nature of the Ecclesia. This theory was proposed by St. Paul. The imagery of the theory, however, is not to be applied too much literally. In the body corporate of the Ecclesia Jesus is the head; each individual is an organ. Life of the organism, as also the health of each organ, depends on the proper co-ordination of the various organs. Similarly for the health of the Ecclesia as a whole as well as for the health of each of her members, whether dead or alive, all the other members must care and pray for. This is what is meant by co-ordination. In the prayer for the remission of sins we do not give any assurance for the good conduct in future of the person prayed for. There is only the humble appeal to the compassion of Jesus. This way of putting things can be applied with regard to the prayer for the remission of the sins of those on the death bed, whose prospects of recovery are remote.

5. And those who did depart from life with hope.

*Ref:* (a) Ruth 2:20... The Lord always keeps His promises to the living and the dead. (G.N.B)

(b) Ps. 88:10-12. Behold you work wonders for the dead. The mighty shall get up and praise thee. Those who are in the tombs will elaborate your mercy and your faithfulness in times of destruction; your miracles in darkness your justice in the forgotten land. (V.G.)

(c) 1Pet. 3:19... In his spiritual existence he went preached to the imprisoned spirits. (V.G.)

*Comment*

The logic, as in the immediate above comment, is to be applied in the case of the departed souls as well. If every one can, on the basis of the decree of Jesus, pray for every one else,

till the *Parousia*, what is illogical, if one prays as Jesus did, for the departed souls, who are awaiting the second coming of our Lord.

6. Prayers and sacrifices for the dead were in vogue in the Jewish Community.

- Ref:* (a) Deut. 33:6. May Reuben never die out; may his tribe grow numberless. (V.G.)
- (b) 2Macc. 12:42, 43. For this reason the entire multitude of people weepingly prayed to the Lord not to write this as a mortal sin. The mighty Judah supplicated the entire people to keep away from sin and protect themselves. He told the people: you have seen with your own eyes as to what all things befell these people. He decided that the people make a collection of money. He collected three thousand silver for those who were killed. He sent them to Jerusalem for offering it as sacrifice for their sins. (V.G.)

*Comment*

The theology apart, the S.O.C. considers the practice of praying for the dead, as sanctioned by Salvation history. For the S.O.C., this practice is historically a symbol of continuity with Her Semitic origin. From the OT, it can be gleaned that the Jewish community had the practice of praying for the departed, even from the hoary past downwards.

7. Further it is taught by our Lord through his actions.

- Ref:* (a) Rom. 5:18. vide. (a) of 1 of Theme 20.
- (b) vide. 1Pet. 3:19, Jn. 17:20, Lk. 7:14, 15.

*Comment*

As already mentioned elsewhere in this commentary, Jesus our Lord cared and prayed for the dead, both on the earth and in the Sheol.

8. Further it was followed by the disciples of our Lord. Also it has been practised in the Church from Her very beginnings till date. Through our prayer for the departed their hope for redemption

gets reinforced and consolation obtained for them as their sins are remitted. Therefore, prayer for the departed is quite pertinent, a must and efficacious. But if one turns out to be purely worldly by thinking that whether in life or afterwards, others would intercede for him, such a thought would amount to a mortal sin.

- Ref:* (a) 2Tim. 1:16-18. May the Lord show mercy to the family of Onesiphorons because he cheered me up many times. He was not ashamed that I am in prison. But as soon as he arrived in Rome he started looking for me. May the Lord grant him his mercy on that day! And you know very well how much he did for me in Ephesus. (G.N.B.)
- (b) 1Cor. 15:29. Now what about those people who are baptised for the dead? What do they hope to accomplish? It is true as some claim that the dead are not raised to life. Why are those people being baptised for the dead. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Acts. 20:10. But Paul went down and threw himself on him and hugged him. "Don't worry", he said, "He is still alive." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This is a clause of consolation and caution. Consolatory because, it brings out emphatically, the efficacy of praying for the dead both theologically and historically; cautionary because, it warns against the tendency of the people to indulge inordinately in worldliness, imagining that others would pray for them after they are no more. The S.O.C. would not approve of this. It is because, such people carry the noble practice of praying for the dead to unauthorised proxy. That type of evasive devices will not be effective.

9. Even if the entire body of saints, prophets and the whole mankind intercede for such a person he would not become eligible for grace.

- Ref:* (a) Ps. 109:14. May the Lord remember the evil of his ancestors and never forgive his mother's, sins. (G.N.B.)



- (b) Jer. 15:4. I will make all the people of the world horrified at them because of what Hezekiah's son Manasseh did in Jerusalem when he was king of Judah. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Jer. 16:6, 7. The rich and the poor will die in this land, but no one will bury them or mourn for them. No one will gash himself or shave his head to show his grief. No one will eat or drink with anyone to comfort him when a loved one dies. No one will show sympathy, not even for someone who has lost his father or mother. (G.N.B.)
- (d) Jer. 17:4. You will have to give up the land I gave you and I will make you serve your enemies in a land you know nothing about because my anger is like a fire and it will burn for ever. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

It is reiterated that anybody indulging in worldliness on the thought that, others will intercede for them, is on the wrong path. Such a person need not have any hope at all of getting the benefit of intercession even if it is performed by the plenitude of the prophets and the entire body of the saints.

10. Since his indulgence in sins as a plea or pretext for enhancing divine mercy is a preposterous one, he would not be granted grace. Grace due to the prayer of others is obtained by those, who though had committed venial sins, become eligible for mercy on account of their straightforward and steadfast faith in Jesus Christ.

*Ref:* Rom. 6:1 What shall we say then? Should we continue to live in sin so that God's grace will increase? Certainly not. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

After targeting and hitting out on the erroneous attitude of those persons who indulge inordinately in the affairs of the world, and bank on the intercession of others, the true import of intercession is explained. Further, the basis and even the extent of the benefit of intercession are pointed out. The

S.O.C. affirms that intercession becomes effective, even in the case of a person of venial sins, provided he or she has a contrite heart, steadfast hope and obdurate faith in the compassion of Christ.

## Theme No: 21

# On Fasting and Eucharistic Celebration etc. for the Dead

1. Besides praying for the parents, brothers and sisters who have died in Christ, observing fast for them, soliciting grace through Eucharistic celebration are good.

*Ref:* (a) 1Sam. 31:13. Then they took the bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in the town and fasted for seven days. (G.N.B.)

(b) 2Sam. 1:12. They grieved and mourned and fasted until evening for Saul and Jonathan and for Israel, the people of the Lord, because so many had been killed in battle. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Here is an instruction to the survivors of the dead ones. They are asked to observe fasts along with saying of prayers for the sake of their relatives who are dead and gone. The intent of these religious exercises must be the spiritual amelioration of the departed, who are still living in Christ. This clause is a pointer to the eschatological dimension of the Church. To put it differently, it expresses the unity of the living and the dead in the fold of the Ecclesia, which is the mystical body of Christ.

2. Celebrating the Eucharist for the dead ones,

*Ref:* (a) Deut. 33:6, op. cit Ref. 6 of Theme 20.

(b) 2Macc. 12:42-43. op. cit Ref. 6 of Theme 20.

### *Comment*

Not content with the above-mentioned instruction, the S.O.C. asks Her followers to arrange Eucharistic celebration for the sake of the dead. It is because, in the Eucharistic celebration, the unity of the dead with the living is effected and hallowed.



Probably, as a legacy of Judaism, the S.O.C. exhorts Her members to do this spiritual exercise for forty days.

3. Performing charitable acts and giving of alms which are acceptable to God are good and pleasing to Him.

*Ref:* (a) Acts. 10:4... The angel answered, "God is pleased with your prayers and works of charity, and is ready to answer you. (G.N.B.)

(b) Dan. 4:27. So then, your Majesty, follow my advice, stop sinning, do what is right and be merciful to the poor. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Giving of alms and performing other charitable acts are also to be done with the intent of remitting the sins of the departed.

4. The entire action of our Lord Jesus and his self sacrifice are not only for the living but the dead also. Following the example set by him we ought do everything possible by thought and action not only for ourselves and those who are alive but also for the departed souls. But even if we celebrate the Eucharist daily and feed the poor with all that we have, for the sake of those who died without hope and faith in Christ and therefore unworthy of grace, our actions will not be of any avail to such people. Such actions, however, done with genuine and bonafide intentions, will be beneficial for the performers.

*Ref:* (a) Rom. 5:18. op. cit. Ref. 1 of Theme 20.

### *Comment*

The theology of performing meritorious deeds for the dead ones is developed on the basis of the words and deeds of Jesus Himself. They were intended, as already mentioned in this work, not only for the living ones but for the dead ones too. That is why our Lord descended to Sheol and preached to the imprisoned souls there. But it must be borne in mind that the Church does not prescribe spiritual exercises simply as perfunctory ones. For, the S.O.C. is aware that the

meritorious actions of the survivors of the dead ones, although may benefit the doers, would be futile if they are intended for those who have departed without faith and hope, in the redemption by Christ.

## Theme No: 22

### On the Relics of Saints

1. We ought to consider as holy the sepulchre of our Lord, and deem the mortal remains and relics of the saints with respect and honour.

*Ref:* (a) 1Kings 13:31. After the burial the prophet said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in this grave and lay my body next to his." (G.N.B.)

(b) 2Kings. 23:17, 19. "Whose tomb is that?" He asked. The people of Bethel answered, "It is the tomb of the prophet who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done to this altar." (G.N.B.)

(c) Ex. 13:19. Moses took the body of Joseph, as Joseph had made the Israelists solemnly promise to do. Joseph had said, "When God rescues you, you must carry my body with you from this place." (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

The S.O.C. asks her followers to revere and honour the Holy tomb of our Lord, the places of interment of the saints, their mortal remains and relics. Such places shall be kept neat and tidy and shall not be allowed to be desecrated at all. The theology is that certain places become surcharged with spiritual touch as the pool of Siloam or the Zunoro churches, where the girdle of the Blessed Virgin is kept. These places come to possess special spiritual power by the subtle spiritual force generated therein due to the presence and prayers of the pious and saintly persons who chanced to stay and live there. This phenomenon has been testified by many a man of piety.

2. Remembering our Lord's power and the grace that has been granted to his saints, whoever reveres their relics and mortal remains will have blessings from God and get their diseases cured.



- Ref:*
- (a) 2Kings 13:21. Once, during a funeral, one of those bands was seen, and the people threw the corps into Elisha's tomb and ran off. As soon as the body came into contact with Elisha's bones, the man came back to life and stood up. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Mt. 9:20, 21. A woman, who had suffered from severe bleedings for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will get well." (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Mt. 14:36. They begged him to let those who were ill, at least touch the edge of his cloak; and all who touched it were made well. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Acts 5:15. As a result of what the Apostles were doing sick people were carried out into the streets and placed on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. (G.N.B.)
  - (e) Acts. 15:19-21... For the Law of Moses has been read for a very long time in the synagogues every sabbath, and his words are preached in every town. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The S.O.C's categorical stand of the benefits that would flow from the holy places is amplified. The benefits need not necessarily be spiritual. Even material benefits like the curing of diseases, and prosperity are achieved by going to and praying at such venerable places.

## Theme No: 23

# On Signing oneself with the mark of the Cross and the Veneration of the Cross

1. We must sign ourselves with the mark of the Cross as a constant reminder of the following. We ought to repose our confidence for our protection and salvation in the death of our Lord on the Cross; we must ever bear it as symbol of the passion of Christ; we should impress on our mind that the Cross is our insignia and honour; we must proclaim that through the Cross we believe all the above and act accordingly; we ought to venerate the Cross as the whole mankind was redeemed through the Cross of the Son of God. The Cross that we must venerate is not the one made of gold, silver, stone, wood etc. and modeled after the Cross of our Lord. They are, rather, made simply for the awakening of, and as a reminder of the Cross of Christ. This in fact, is one of the main reasons why the Cross is not consecrated. But as we comprehend in our heart the great God who cannot be seen or stipulated and who can be seen only through the inner spiritual eye, we must imprint on the tablets of our hearts the Cross of the Son of God and worship the same by looking at it through our spiritual eye.

- Ref:*
- (a) Gal. 6:14. But I will never brag about anything except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his Cross, the world is dead as far as I am concerned and I am dead as far as the world is concerned. (L.B.)
  - (b) 1Cor. 1:18. The message about the Cross does not make any sense to lost people but for those of us who are being saved, it is God's power at work. (L.B.)
  - (c) Heb. 13:13. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp and share his shame. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Mt. 16:24. Then Jesus said to his disciple, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself carry his Cross and follow me". (G.N.B.)

- (c) Phil. 3:18... There are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ's death on the Cross. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

It is commonplace that the Cross has become the acknowledged sign of Christianity, all throughout the world. Therefore, it is only in the fitness of piety that we mark ourselves with the sign of the Cross. While doing so it is good that we are reminded of the following:- Firstly the Crucifixion of our Lord, secondly our protection from evil thereby, the salvation that the Cross has brought to mankind. Further, the cross epitomises the alpha and omega of theology and ecclesiology combined. The signing on the forehead and the breast is a reminder of the descent of our Lord from the high heavens to the earthly plane. The horizontal signing should recall to our mind the obligation for communion with the Ecclesia. Besides this interpretation, the S.O.C. honours the one given by Severius, one of the early Patriarchs of the Antiochean See. He contended that the signing by the Cross signifies the divine descent and the divine salvation of mankind. So in the crossing, firstly there is the signing from the forehead to the breast and secondly from the left arm to the right. The latter is because in the symbology of the Syrian Church left side stands for the wicked aspect, while the right side signifies the virtuous condition. For the doubt, whether, venerating the Cross amounts to idolatry, the theological answer that the S.O.C. proposes is explicated here. Unlike the Church of the East, the Cross is not consecrated by the S.O.C. as to make it a sacrament. Therefore, the S.O.C. forbids the adoration of the Cross as we adore God. The S.O.C. worships only the crucified Christ and not the Cross. The Cross of Jesus alone is to be venerated. The Crosses that we make are only symbols of the one Cross at the Calvary that bore Jesus. If the Blessed Virgin bore Him in Her womb, at the time of Incarnation, the Cross at Calvary bore Him at His death. So it became the life giving Cross. As one can see the mighty Sun only through a



micro hole , or niche, so can one see the Crucified Christ through the Crosses that we make out of wood metals etc. This vision of course is possible only by the luminous eye of the inner spirit.

2. Veneration of the cross is really the adoration of the crucified Christ and His Crucifixion. As none of the actions of David in front of the Ark of the Covenant is deemed idolatrous but as one performed before God, so the adoration of Christ and his Crucifixion on the Cross are not to be considered idolatry but rather as blessed actions.

*Ref:* (a) Heb. 11:21. It was faith that made Jacob bless each of the sons of Joseph just before he died. He leaned on the top of his walking stick and worshipped God. (G.N.B.)

- (b) 2Sam. 6:14-16. David, wearing only a linen cloth round his waist, danced with all his might to honour the Lord and so he and all the Israelites took the Covenant box upto Jersusalem with shouts of joy and sound of trumpets. As the box was being brought into the city Michal, Saul's daughter, looked out of the window and saw king David dancing and jumping around in the sacred dance, and she was disgusted with him. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This also is an argument to establish that, the veneration that we offer to the Crosses is not idolatry. The theological aspect is brought from another perspective. It is as follows. Actually what we do, while venerating a man- made Cross as a symbol of the Cross of the Lord, is that, through such observance we venerate the Cross and the Crucifixion of our Lord. As and when we are capable of bringing out the distinction between the reality and the symbol, all confusions centred on the veneration of Crosses would cease to have any hold on our mind.

3. What is forbidden is the moulding of the idols and the worshipping of them.

- Ref:* (a) Ex. 20:4-5. Do not make idols that looks like anything in the sky or on earth or in the ocean under the earth. Don't bow down and worship idols. I am the Lord your God... (L.B.)
- (b) 2Kings 18:4. He destroyed the local shrines, then tore down the images of foreign gods and cut down the sacred pole for worshipping the goddess Asherah. He also smashed the bronze snake, Moses had made. The people had named it Nehushtan and had been offering sacrifices to it. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

Only when somebody worships an image, moulded or made does the act become idolatory. The essence in worship, the adoration etc. is of course mental attitude; and it is not to be judged by externalities; that is to say, they are basically subjective and not objective. So the injunction of the S.O.C. primarily aims at the frame of mind and mental attitudes.

4. And not the making of articles as mementoes of biblical events or of Crosses for decoration or ornamentation.

- Ref:* (a) Ex. 25:18-19. Then hammer out two winged creatures of pure gold and fasten them to the lid at the ends of the chest. (L.B.)
- (b) Num. 21:8. Moses prayed and the Lord answered, "Make a snake out of bronze and place it on top of a pole. Anyone who gets bitten can look at the snake and won't die. (L.B.)
- (c) Josh. 4:2-7. Tell one man from each of the twelve tribes to pick up a large rock from where the priests are standing. Then have the men set up those rocks as a monument at the place where you camp tonight. Joshua chose twelve men; he called them together and told them: Go to the middle of the river bed where the sacred chest is and pick up a large rock carry it on your shoulder to our camp. There are twelve of you, so there will be one rock for each tribe. Some day your children will ask, "Why are these rocks here?" Then you will tell them how the

water stopped flowing when the chest was being carried across the river. These rocks will always remind our people of what happened here today.  
(L.B.)

*Comment*

When somebody makes a memento or a replica of the Cross of our Lord and venerates the same, it cannot be objectively judged as worship. For worship, as noted above, is a mental exercise although accompanied or attended by certain externalities, which are essentially of a secondary nature.

5. Likewise venerating and honouring of churches or church articles can in no way be considered idolatry.

*Ref:* (a) Lev. 12:4. Then it will be thirty three more days before she is ritually clean from her loss of blood; she must not touch anything that is holy or enter the sacred tent until the time of her purification is completed.  
(G.N.B.)

(b) vide. 2 Sam. 6:7. (G.N.B.)

(c) vide. Dan. 5:7. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

On the basis of the theology of the distinction between reality and replica, it is contented that, honouring of church buildings, church articles etc do not amount to worshipping them as such.



## Theme No: 24

# On Chastity

1. Nobody shall be forbidden from entering into wedlock.

*Ref:* 1 Tim. 4:3. Such people teach that it is wrong to marry.  
(G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This is an argument to remove the mistaken notions on marriage and chastity. As marriage is a sacrament, it cannot be forbidden even by putting forward that celibacy is a condition for chastity. It is opined so, because chastity in the true sense is a mental disposition along with externalities. Mere abstinence from marital relationship will not make a person chaste. It is common knowledge that it needs more than a philosopher's gown to make a man a genuine philosopher. Marriage is no hindrance to chastity or saintliness. We may recall that many of the Jewish prophets were married men.

2. If one opts voluntarily to keep himself free from wedlock for keeping his body and mind ever ready to perform the work for God's sake, it is good.

*Ref:* (a) 1Cor. 7:7-8. Actually I would prefer that all of you were as I am. But each one has a special gift from God. One person this gift another one that gift. Now to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to continue to live alone as I do. (G.N.B.)

(b) 1Cor. 7:32, 33. I would like you to be free from worry. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work; because he is trying to please the Lord. But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife and so he is pulled in two directions. (G.N.B.)

(c) Mt. 19:12. For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some because they were born that

way; others, because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Let him who can accept these teaching do so. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Marriage cannot be imposed on a person. If one decides to be a bachelor or spinster as the case may be, on the ground that it is better to be so far God's work, no one shall interfere with the decision. But a word of caveat or caution. The decision to remain single should be the result of due deliberation. If so vouched, by the person concerned, it must be regarded as emanating from '... the infinitesimal wisdom of the Lord,' as St. Thomas A Kempis puts it in some other context.

3. Even though a person who took the vow of chastity subsequently renounces it and marries, he does not become blameless albeit not ineligible for grace; such persons must be removed from the respective positions held by them in the Church.

*Ref:* 1Tim. 2:12. I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The ecclesiastical attitude to a person who breaks the vow of chastity is formulated here. The Church would not regard such an action as one to be pardoned. The Ecclesia is very strict that such persons should be removed from the ecclesiastical offices. It is certainly not as a retributive punishment, but as an exemplary and a preventive one. When such a person repents, the Church holds that the person concerned is eligible for divine grace.

## Theme No: 25

### On the Matrimony of the Clergy

1. It is not because matrimony is unclean, but because the incumbents of the offices of Patriarch, Catholicose and Bishop have special responsibility, and so are expected to devote their entire time in the discharge of such duties,

*Ref:* 1 of Theme 11

#### *Comment*

The Church today does not permit the bishops, archbishops, the Catholicos and the Patriarchs to marry. This restriction is however not theological. It appears that this practice of celibacy crept into the Church, as noted elsewhere in this work, following the emergence of monastic orders and its influence. It has already been pointed out that some of the early prelates of the Church, like a few of the Cappadocian Fathers were married men.

2. Because they are to keep away from carnal desires for Godly pursuits they are expected to be 'religious'. But as the priests who manage the affairs of the churches have to be free and friendly, with both men and women alike,

*Ref:* op. cit. 2 (a) of Theme 24.

#### *Comment*

The rationale for the restriction of marriage of Ecclesiastical dignitaries like the bishops and the personages of the higher offices is reiterated. It is necessitated by the need to keep such officers completely free from carnal desires and make them fully devoted to religious causes. This practice, however, is not strictly to be followed in the case of priests. The argument is that by and large the priests have to be in the world, move in the world and mix with people, both men and women, as parish vicars or in charge of other missions. In short the dictum of the S.O.C. is that the priests shall not marry. So the S.O.C. make the following provision. If a person



desirous of getting ordained as a priest wants to marry he should have got married before he assumed the holy robes of priesthood. That is why, the S.O.C. forbids remarriage of priests. If he opts to marry he has to restrain from priestly functions.

3. And also because human nature is weak and prone to temptation,

*Ref:* 1Cor. 7:5, 6. Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless, you first agree to do so for a while, in order to spend your time in prayer. But then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self control - I tell you this not as an order but simply as a concession. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Another justification for permitting married persons and deacons to become priest is brought out. This argument has Pauline sanction behind it.

4. The decree of the Church that they marry is very logical. But the priests shall not indulge in remarriage; or take widows as wives.

*Ref:* (a) 1Tim. 3:2. A church leader must be without fault, he must have only one wife. (G.N.B.)  
(b) Lev. 21: 13-14. He shall marry a virgin, not a widow or divorced woman or a woman who has been a prostitute. He shall marry only a virgin from his own clan. (G.N.B.)  
(c) Titus 1:6. An elder must be blameless; he must have only one wife... (G.N.B.)  
(d) vide. 1Cor. 7:8-27. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

On the whole the stance of the S.O.C. with regard to marriage of the clergy sounds logical and humane. As sexual instinct cannot be easily uprooted, celibacy for the priests is not made mandatory even for expediency sake. Celibacy for ecclesiastical officers of higher rank is decreed for certain specific grounds.

## Theme No: 26

### On Human Soul

1. It is to the body and soul in unison and not to their mutual exclusion that God passes judgement on human beings and grants salvation to them.

*Ref:* Mt. 10:28. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God who can destroy both body and soul in hell. (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

The anthropology that the S.O.C. upholds is delineated. Accordingly, the Church contends that the entity called human being is a complex one; a combination of the visible physique and invisible soul. This view has likeness to Jewish anthropology, the gist of which is as follows. Humans alone have souls in them. Humans possess souls because God breathed life-giving breath into their nostrils. With regard to other animals and birds God does not seem to have done this. So they are soulless. The S.O.C. seems to have taken the cue from this theory to build up Her anthropology.

2. As the human body is the creation of God, so is the soul of man. Although endowed with the faculty of intelligence and having no end, the human soul is not without beginning. But the theory propagated by some that the soul is uncreated and merely a part of God and hence not subject to punishment is a heresy and would lead men to grave dangers.

*Ref:* (a) Gen. 1:27. So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he, male and female created he them. (K.J.V.)

(b) Zech. 12:1... The Lord, which stretches forth the heavens and layeth the foundation of the earth and formeth the spirit of man within him. (K.J.V.)

*Comment*

The S.O.C. opposes certain theories on human soul, as propagated by some other religions. For the S.O.C., to say that soul is God or part of God is pure blasphemy, as the created can never be equated or approximated to the Creator. The S.O.C. feels that the theory is likely to imbue in human mind the seeds of false and exaggerated ego. So the Syrian Orthodox Church holds dualistic theory with regard to creation as a whole and about human soul. As the soul is endless there will be eternal damnation or eternal bliss for the individual human souls, as the case may be.



## Theme No: 27

### On Sin

1. Every human being is guilty before God; not only by original sin but by sins committed in life. Even though there is nobody without sin,

*Ref:* Rom. 3:9-12. Will then are we Jews in any better condition than the Gentiles? Not at all! I have already shown that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As the scriptures say: 'There is no one who is righteous, no one who is wise or who worships God. All have turned away from God; they have all gone wrong; no one does what is right; not even one.' (G.N.B.)

- (b) Rom 5:18. So then, as the one sin condemned all mankind, in the same way the one righteous act sets all mankind free and gives them life. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Gal. 3:22. But the scripture says that the whole world is under the power of sin... (G.N.B.)
- (d) Sam. 11:1-3. I trust in the Lord for safety. How foolish of you to say to me, "Fly away like a bird to the mountains because the wicked have drawn their bows and aimed their arrows to shoot from the shadows at good men. There is nothing a good man do when everything falls apart. (G.N.B.)
- (e) 1Jn. 1:8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and there is no truth in us. (G.N.B.)
- (f) 1King 8:46. "When your people sin against you - and there is no one who does not sin..." (G.N.B.)
- (g) vide. Ecc. 7:24. (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

No person, be he or she is of any time or clime, says the S.O.C. is sinless. To say the contrary is a travesty and hence a sin against the Holy Spirit. Besides original sin, which is a legacy of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, every individual gets involved in sins, while alive. This

involvement is due to the erroneous exercise of the free will, which we are endowed with. It may be recalled that, it is through baptism that the stains of original sins are washed off. Repentance and its corollary confession, remove the imprints of the sins committed in the post-baptismal life.

2. Sin, other than original sin, is not created by the nature of man.

- Ref:* (a) Ecc. 7:29... God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Gen. 1:26, 27, 31. Then God said, "And now we shall make human beings; they will be like us and will resemble us..." So God created human beings, making them to be like himself... God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased... (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

It is not correct to say that human beings are by nature sinful or corrupt. The S.O.C. says so, considering that God created human beings in His image and likeness. God's substance and nature cannot be sinful. So their counterparts in humans must also be sinless. After all, sin is a behavioral flaw and it creeps into human activity as a result of the defective exercise or maladjustment of the boon of free will.

3. It is rather related to the Covenant and originated by the violation of the Command.

- Ref:* (a) Cor. 15:56. Death gets its power to hurt from sin, and sin gets its power from the Law. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Rom. 4:15. The Law brings down God's anger; but where there is no law there is no disobeying of the law. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Rom. 5:13. There was sin in the world before the Law was given. But where there is no law, no account is kept of sins. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

When the free will is employed carelessly as to violate divine commands or break the Covenant of God, sin entails. This view of the Church has Pauline touch.

4. Men do good or bad due to their freedom of action and not because of the difference in their nature. God has not created anybody a sinner.

*Ref:* (a) Deu. 11:26-28. You have a choice - Do you want the Lord to bless you or do you want him to put a curse on you? Today I am giving you his laws and if you obey him, he will bless you. But if you disobey him and worship those gods that have never done anything for you, the Lord will put a curse on you. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

The fact that the misuse of human will is the cause of sin is presented again. Human nature is basically the same in all individuals. It can, in conjunction with the will, ward off sin or in the other way round make the individual perpetrate sin. In simple words, the will of the individual can make or mar men's destiny. Nobody shall shirk off the responsibility for having committed evil things on the plea that it was God's will that prompted to commit the sin.

5. Nobody is coerced to do good or bad; no reward or punishment is meted out by forcefully making somebody do good or bad.

*Ref:* (a) Jas. 1:13-15. Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil and he does not use evil to tempt others. We are tempted by our own desires, that drag us off and trap us. Our desires make us sin and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead. (L.B.)

(b) 1Pet. 5:12. Just as shepherds watch over their sheep, you must watch over everyone God has placed in your care. Do it willingly in order to please God and not simply because you think you must. Let it be something you want to do, instead of something you do merely to make money. (L.B.)

(c) Is. 1:19-20. If you willingly obey me, the best crops in the land will be yours. But if you turn against me, your enemies will kill you... (L.B.)



- (d) 2Cor. 9:7. Each of you must make up your own mind about how much to give. But don't feel sorry that you must give and don't feel that you are forced to give. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

God does not intend any body to be a sinner. Likewise He does not induce any body to do good. Performing good or bad things is definitely due to the exercise of the free will of the human beings. It is not on account of God's working that a man commits sins and incur punishments. Conversely, it is not God who pushes a person to righteousness as to receive rewards. Ultimately it cannot be gainsaid that reward and punishment are the results of the individual's own actions. No proxy or excuse of any sort can be adduced in this.

- 6. But God instructs man as to which is good and bad, prompts him to turn to righteousness; He helps man to do good while does not aid him to do evil.

- Ref:*
- (a) Mic. 6:8. No, the Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love and to live in humble fellowship with our God. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) 1Tim. 2:4. God wants everyone to be saved and to know the whole truth... (L.B.)
  - (c) Rom. 8:28. We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone, who loves him. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

Although committing of evil or performing of good is exclusively the responsibility of the individual, God did not fail to instruct mankind as to which is good and which is bad. God had done this from time to time through His envoys and emissaries with the full consummation of it in Christ the Lord. The answer that Jesus gives to the wealthy man in the parable of the rich and Lazarus is indicative of this fact. So, while alive, obey the saying of the saintly persons and pay heed to the preaching of the prophets.

## 7. Leaves everyone to his choice.

- Ref:* (a) Acts 14:15. Why are you doing this? We are humans like you. Please give up all these foolishness. Turn to the living God, who made the sky, the earth the sea and everything in them. (L.B.)
- (b) Ps. 81:12. So I let you be stubborn and keep on following your own advice. (L.B.)

*Comment*

The undertone is that, whatever befalls a human being is his or her own making. It signifies that, human being is given the freedom to steer clear of the pitfalls by judiciously exercising the free will.

## 8. Satan is not given the authority to coax anybody to commit sin.

- Ref:* Jas. 4:7. Surrender to God! Resist the devil and he will run from you. (L.B.)

*Comment*

An answer to those who say that evil is perpetrated by the working of the devil. The S.O.C. refutes that Satan is given the power to coax any person into committing evil. Satan is not man's master.

## 9. Satan leads men to the death trap of sin by seducing. As, faith, good works etc. do have gradation into small and great ones,

- Ref:* Eph. 6:11. Put on all the armour that God gives, so you can defend yourself against the devils' tricks. (L.B.)

*Comment*

Satan, although helpless to coax, may tempt and seduce some persons. The weak in will and the dull in intelligence will fall easy preys to the ways of Satan; but the strong willed and the vigilant will emerge victorious. Satan is crafty and cunning enough to work on this fact of gradation of human beings. So it is the responsibility of human beings to grow in strength of the will. All religious and spiritual exercises, moral and ethical instructions are aimed at achieving this goal.

## 10. Sin has also gradation.

*Ref:* Jn. 19:11... So the man who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

Sins are graded into mortal and venial ones. The former are those, which will deprive of the grace of God. The latter will not do so. According to some theologians of the S.O.C., there cannot be a permanent catalogue of the categories of sin. To them, the role of the individual conscience at the time of doing an act is a determinant factor in deciding the categorisation of sins. As a general rule, sins against one's own conscience are to be branded as mortal ones. Similarly on the basis of the words of Jesus it may be stated that utterances against the Holy Spirit are also to be included in this category.

## 11. Even so, no sin goes unremitted by repentance. What is said to be mortal sins and sins against the Holy Spirit are those for which repentance is not bought by the sinner and which easily push one to a state of depression and for which remission will not be obtained by the supplication of others. Therefore, without despairing about the sins committed, supplicatory prayers with a contrite heart and profound lamentation should be performed before God the merciful.

*Ref:* (a) Jer. 3:12. He told me to go and say to Israel "You unfaithful Israel come back to me. I am merciful and I will not be angry with you for ever." (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The categorization into mortal and venial sins is effected because it is to be considered with regard to the way in which remission of sins is obtained and penance prescribed. The S.O.C. assures everybody that no sin will remain unremitted if forgiveness is solicited with a pure and contrite heart. In this context it is worthwhile to bring to mind the parable of the prodigal son and the advice of Jesus to St. Peter as to how many times one ought forgive his brother.



Theme No: 28

## On Repentance

1. When a person does not repent for the sins committed, is reluctant to retract from doing things evil, and persists in perpetrating them, he is said to commit sins which are against the Holy Spirit and so described as mortal ones.

- Ref:*
- (a) Lk. 12:10. "Anyone who says a word against the Son of Man can be forgiven. But whoever says evil things against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." (G.N.B.)
  - (b) 1Jn. 5:16. If you see your brother commit a sin that does not lead to death you should pray to God who will give him life. This applies to those whose sins do not lead to death. But there is sin which leads to death and I do not say that you should pray to God about that. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Mt. 12:31, 32. And so I tell you, people can be forgiven any sin and any evil thing they say; but whoever says evil things against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who says something against the Son of Man can be forgiven; but whoever says something against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven - now or for ever. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Heb. 6:4-6. For how can those who abandon their faith be, brought back to repent again? They were once in God's light; they tasted heaven's gift and received their share of Holy Spirit. they knew from experience that God's word is good, and they had felt the powers of the coming age. And then they abandoned their faith! It is impossible to bring them back to repent again because, they are again crucifying the Son of God and exposing him to public shame. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

Sins against the Holy Spirit are detailed. Even after realizing,

either on the basis of the murmurings of the conscience or through external agencies of any sort, if a person does not repent for the sins committed or does not give up the evil ways, that is to be deemed as sins against the Holy Spirit. As noted elsewhere in this commentary the role of conscience in the categorisation of sins into mortal and venial is touched upon.

2. Nevertheless when a person turns to God with true penitence his or her sins, be they of any kind, will not go unremitted; what is implied by true penance is the earnest seeking of forgiveness for the sins perpetrated, keeping away from the sins that are being or likely to be committed and resolving in heart to trod along the path of righteousness with perfect obedience that pleases God. The doors of repentance will not be kept sealed to any type of sinners. Therefore nobody shall believe the theory propagated by the reformers that the post baptismal sins shall not be forgiven as they are sins against the Holy Spirit and therefore mortal ones; believing such theories, nobody shall keep away from repentance out of despair on that score. Such sinners must repent with full hope and faith and draw near the all merciful God.

*Ref:* (a) Is. 1:18. The Lord says now, "Now let's settle the matters. You are stained red with sin, but I will wash you as clean as snow. Although your stains are deep red, you will be as white as wool. (G.N.B.)

(b) 1Jn. 1:9. But if we confess our sins to God he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all wrong doings. (G.N.B.)

(c) Mic. 7:18. There is no other God like you, O Lord; you forgive the sins of our people who have survived. You do not stay angry for ever but you take pleasure in showing us your constant love. (G.N.B.)

- (d) Hos. 14:4-6. The Lord says, “I will bring my people back to me. I will love them with all my heart; no longer am I angry with them...” (G.N.B.)
- (e) Jer. 3:12. He told me to go and say to Israel, “unfaithful Israel, come back to me, I am merciful and will not be angry; I will not be angry with you for ever.” (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

There is consolation for even the mortal sinners. If such sinners repent with the resolve to keep away from committing sins in the future, the fruits of repentance will not be lacking. This is emphasised to allay the fear and depression generated by believing false theories, which depict the post-baptismal sins as mortal ones. It is reiterated that since God is all merciful there is scope for every mortal sinner to be forgiven provided, he or she opens the heart to the Lord. The prayer of the public man as narrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is worth recalling.

3. Pay no heed to the propagation of the *Navarthian* heretics. Repent with good hope and genuine faith, for the sins committed at any time or at any situation and approach the merciful God.

*Ref:* (a) Mt. 18:21, 22. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?” “No, not seven times.” answered Jesus, “but seventy times seven.” (G.N.B.)

- (b) Mt. 26:74, 75. Then Peter said, “I swear that I am telling the truth! May God punish me, if I am not! I do not know that man!” Just then a cock crowed and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the cock crows you will say three times, that you do not know me.” He went out and wept bitterly. (G.N.B.)



## Theme No: 29

### On Justification

#### 1. Just as faith without action is lifeless;

- Ref:* (a) Jas. 2:17. Faith that does not lead us to do good deeds is alone and dead. (L.B.)
- (b) Jas. 2:26. Anyone who does not breathe is dead; and faith that does not do anything is just as dead! (L.B.)

#### *Comment*

Discussion on the question of justification is opened. Even during the Apostolic Age of the Church there were hot debates whether faith without good actions alone or good actions without faith alone, or faith, complemented with actions is necessary for gaining the grace of God. Biblical scholars suggests that St. Paul and St. James held opposing views about it. While the former upheld justification by faith, the latter held the contrarary to be the valid one. The S.O.C. opines that either theory in isolation is incomplete. Therefore She asserts that mere faith without action is at best a simple oral profession, lacking life.

#### 2. Action without bonafide intentions and faith is also without life.

- Ref:* (a) Rom. 14:23... And anything that is not based on faith is sin. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Mt. 6:3. When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what the right hand doeth. (K.J.V.)

#### *Comment*

Actions performed without good intentions and sound faith in the Lord, may although be lauded as good ones apparently, will not gain merit religiously. So the S.O.C. rebuts the theory of justification by action alone.

#### 3. The mercy of God is even handed and without discrimination or favouritism. The Lord does not give grace freely to one and deny the same to another. Therefore man is justified neither by

faith without action nor by actions without faith nor by free grace alone.

- Ref:*
- (a) Rom. 3:22. God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all, who believe in Christ because there is no difference at all. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Rom: 10: 11-13 For it is by our faith that we are outright with God; it is by our confession that we are saved. The scripture says, “whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. This includes everyone because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, God is the same Lord of all and rightly blesses all who call to him; as the scripture says, everyone who calls out to the Lord for help will be saved.” (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The theory that God grants grace whimsically or on the basis of his own liking is refuted here. For that would be against the justice of God. The grace of God will be showered on those deserving, by the standards of faith and action.

4. It is, rather, by grace, obtained through faith that is accompanied with action.

- Ref:*
- (a) Jas. 2:22. Can't you see? His faith and his actions worked together; his faith was made perfect through his actions. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Eph. 2:8. For it is by God's grace that you have been saved. It is not the result of your own efforts but God's gift... (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This, according to the S.O.C. is the true theory of justification. Faith or good action to the exclusion of each other is insufficient for justification. Obviously this is the clue to the oft raised and hotly debated question 'Why is God not pleased with an apparently just person or why does God grant grace to a person, ostensibly evil'. The Lord looks into both the external actions as well as internal motives, even though His preference appears to be to the latter.

## Theme No: 30

### On Salvation and Punishment

1. The level of faith and justice among men are not alike; so is the case of sin too. Faith, justice and sin have different levels or grades.

- Ref:*
- (a) Rom. 12:6. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Mt. 8:10. When Jesus heard this, he was surprised and said to the people following him, "I tell you I have never found anyone in Israel with faith like this." (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Mt. 14:31 At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?" (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Mt. 4:22. And at once they left the boat and their father and went with him. (G.N.B.)
  - (e) Jn. 19:11. Jesus answered, "You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God. So the man who handed me to you, is guilty of a worse sin." (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

It is obvious that men vary in their physical cum mental faculties and tendencies. Likewise there are differences in the levels of conception as regards love, justice and sin. This variation comes out of the immeasurable wisdom in the creative plan of God. Had it not been so, the world and its working would have been monotonous on account of dull uniformity. After all, variety, so goes the adage, is the spice of life.

2. Punishment and salvation are meted out at the judgement day not in a uniform measure; they are given more or less as per the proportion of the intensity of their faith and quality of actions.



- Ref:*
- (a) Mt. 7:2. For God will Judge you in the same way as you Judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others.(G.N.B.)
  - (b) Lk. 12:14. Jesus answered him, “My friend, who gave me the right to Judge, or to divide the property between you two?” (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Lk. 12:58. If some one brings a law suit and takes you to court, do your best, to settle the dispute with him before you get to court. If you don’t he will drag you before the judge who will hand you over to the police and you will be put in jail. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) 1Cor. 5:4... I have in the name of our Lord Jesus already passed judgement on the man, who has done this terrible thing. (G.N.B.)
  - (e) Jn. 4:2. But Jesus’ disciples were really the ones doing the baptising and not Jesus himself. (L.B.)

### *Comment*

On account of the variations in humans, God would mete out judgement not in a uniform pattern or paradigm. But the judgement is pronounced, on the other hand, according to the standards which human beings prescribe while dealing with the fellow citizens. Lord Jesus very rightly observed that a man would be judged as he judges others. It implies that, each man or woman gets from God what he or she deserves.

### 3. And there will be either eternal damnation or eternal salvation.

- Ref:*
- (a) Mt. 25:46. These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment but the righteous will go to eternal life. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Jn. 3:16. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Jn. 3:36. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son, will not have life, but will remain under God’s punishment. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The S.O.C. holds that, the final outcome of judgement would be either eternal salvation and bliss or damnation and suffering. Regarding the fate of the departed souls until the day of judgement, the S.O.C. does not entertain, the concept of purgatory, which the Roman Church holds.

4. If one turns away from good to evil and if another person does the converse thing, the original goodness in the former case and the original evil in the latter case shall not be remembered. Such a person, however, will have either eternal punishment or eternal happiness, depending on the quantum of goodness, that stands to his or her credit.

*Ref:* (a) Ezek. 18:21-24. "If an evil man stops sinning, and keeps my laws, if he does what is right and good, he will not die: he will certainly live. All his sins will be forgiven and he will live because he did what is right. Do you think that I enjoy seeing an evil man die?" Asks the Sovereign Lord. "No, I would rather see him repent and live. But if a righteous man stops doing good and starts doing all the evil, disgusting things that evil men do, will he go on living? No! None of the good he did will be remembered. He will die because of his unfaithfulness and his sins.

### *Comment*

This is a warning, that as for God, human bargaining or human accounting would be of no avail. So, they are told not to turn to evil ways on the confidence that their once-commended noble ways would win for them the mercy of God or that the good actions which they had performed in their lives would stand them in good stead.

5. The above dispensation of the Lord, who is full of mercy and justice, generates hope and interest in the penitence. But as the teaching of some that redemption and salvation are the fruits of grace given freely by God in accordance with his early

dispensation, which says that every one will have identical justice, renders the God of Justice, into an unjust one.

*Ref:* Lk. 15:17, 18, 19. So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pots the pigs ate. But no one gave him anything to eat. At last he came to his senses and said, "All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat and here I am about to starve! I will get up and go to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son." Treat me as one of your hired workers." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

A further warning not to capitalise on the infinite mercy of God. For the S.O.C. the theory called *akaphatastasis* or that God would grant salvation to all as put forward by the genius *Origen* of Alexandria is not only acceptable but a heresy also. It was this theory of his, which stood as a bar for *Origen* being canonised by the Church. The S.O.C. holds that God's mercy and justice have to be held evenly in every judgement of His.



## Theme No: 31

# On Resurrection

### *Introduction*

The soul and the body are rendered separate by the stroke of death. The body thereupon returns to dust.

### *Comment*

According to the theology of the S.O.C. death is a feat of separation. In death the body and the soul are separated. Earth unto earth or dust unto dust, the body returns, while the soul soars up to its ethereal abode.

1. On the Dooms Day, however, the body will be resurrected, unite with the soul, attain indestructibility and enjoy eternal blessings or suffer eternal damnation. Everyone must hold this view. Nobody should believe at all, the theories put forward by some pagans that resurrection is reserved for the just and so there is no general resurrection or the theory that resurrection implies, transmigration of the souls from one human body to another human body.

*Ref:* (a) Is. 26:19. Those of our people who have died will live again! Their bodies will come back to life. All those sleeping in their graves will wake up and sing for joy. As the sparkling dew refreshes the earth so the Lord will revive those who have long been dead. (G.N.B.)

(b) Dan. 12:2. Many of those who have already died will live again: Some will enjoy eternal life and some will suffer eternal disgrace. (G.N.B.)

(c) Jn. 5:28, 29. Do not be surprised at this; the time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice and come out of their graves; those who have done good will rise and live and those who have done evil will rise and be condemned. (G.N.B.)

- (d) Rom. 6:5. For, since we have become one with him and dying as he did, in the same way we shall be one with him by being raised to life as he was. (G.N.B.)
- (e) vide. 1Cor. 15: 7
- (f) vide. Ezek. 37: 7

### *Comment*

Here is a paraphrase as to what befalls a body at death. As noted above earth holds the body; but at the herald of the dooms day, all the departed souls without any exception would reunite with their original body and face the retributive judgement of the Lord. Once the judgement is passed the humans with their bodies and souls reunited, would go to eternal damnation or eternal salvation. This is the rationale for keeping the dead bodies in tact without any maiming or mutilation. The doctrine of transmigration as held by the Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and some others is not acceptable to the S.O.C. One of the reasons for this is that the S.O.C. as other sects of Christianity subscribes itself to the linear computation of time as against the cyclic conception upheld by Hindus and other religions of Indian origin.

## Theme No: 32

### On Independent Creation, Free Will and Pre-Determination

1. Although man's tendency is such that it makes his mind cleave towards either good or evil, he is created with the freedom to make it behave as he pleases. As one is endowed with the freedom to commit sin, so is he free not to commit it, if he so chooses. God desires that man engages his free will for doing good.

*Ref:* (a) Deut. 11:26-28. "Today, I am giving you a choice between a blessing and a curse - a blessing, if you obey the commands of the Lord, Your God, that I am giving you today but a curse, if you disobey these commands..." (G.N.B.)

- (b) Deut. 30:19. I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessing and God's curse and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. (G.N.B.)

#### *Comment*

Theory of the S.O.C. against pre-determination as expounded by John Calvin of France and others. According to the S.O.C., human being is not an automatum or a pawn in the game of fate as the ancient Greeks held. Free will, is a grand gift of God to mankind, says the Church. They can do or undo their destiny by judicious or licentious ways in which free will is exercised or employed. This is the crux of the theory of the judgement of God.

2. God coaxes nobody to perform bad or good action; nor does He disburse punishments or rewards in that way. On the other hand He naturally helps those who seek the good, for, although, God has given freedom, along with the faculty of thinking to human beings to choose between good or bad,

*Ref:* op. cit Ref. 5 of Theme 27.



*Comment*

On no ground does God cause compulsion for humans to do or not to do good or bad. Nevertheless it is His nature to help those who are desirous earnestly to do well. Herein lies the need to solicit God's help, to facilitate the doing of good things.

3. Humans by themselves are helpless to perform any good.

- Ref:* (a) Jn. 15:5. "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit, for you can do nothing without me. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Acts. 17:28. As some one has said, "In Him we live and move and exist. It is as some of your poets have said, 'we too are his children'. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

This is a caution to human beings, not to boast or make a big issue when they perform any good. That is why Jesus taught that what the right hand does, the left shall not know and vice versa. It is true that the humans have the free will but when they exercise it, evil forces try to overpower them. So if men are to be successful they have to be persistent and not get exhausted. This is possible only when the grace of God is showered upon men.

4. But as God does not help evil, He lets them do it as they please, without helping humans to perform it.

- Ref:* (a) Ps. 81:12. So I let them go their stubborn ways and do whatever they wanted. (G.N.B.)
- (b) Acts 14:15, 16. "Why are you doing this? We ourselves are only human beings like you! We are here to announce the Good News, to turn you away from these worthless things to the living God who made heaven, earth, sea and all that is in them. In the past he allowed all people to go their own way. (G.N.B.)
- (c) Jan. 1:13: 15. If a person is tempted by such trials, he must not say, "this temptation comes from God".

For, God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But a person is tempted when he is drawn away and trapped by his own evil desire. Then his evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin and when it is full grown gives birth to death. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

If someone cares not to solicit God's help, God would let that person to do as the latter wishes. Such a person shall not put forward the plea that God did not help to overcome the barriers of temptation which way laid him or her.

5. Except that God has been in possession, even before the Creation of the world, of the foreknowledge that so and so would attain eternal life by depending on His grace through the Son and that such and such persons would disregard the same and become victims of judgement,

- Ref:* (a) Acts. 2:23. God had already planned and decided that Jesus would be handed over to you, so you took him and had evil men put him to death on a Cross. (L.B.)
- (b) Rom. 8:29. He has always known who his chosen ones would be. He had decided to let them become like his own Son, so that His Son would be the first of many children. (L.B.)
- (c) Rom. 11:2. God has not rejected his people, whom he chose from the beginning. (G.N.B.)
- (d) 1Pet. 1:2. You were chosen according to the purpose of God the Father, and were made a holy people by his spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and he purified by his blood... (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

This appears to be the correct view regarding the reconciliation of God's foreknowledge and the freedom of men. True, God has the foreknowledge, but after having endowed humans with free will, God does not impose his will on each and every action of theirs for, that would turn God

into an autocrat and a despot. Although apparently God's foreknowledge and human free will are antithetical, theologians of the S.O.C., however, would not concede this. Instead they contend that it is a mystery like Trinity. So what is possible is to give some explanations. In this backdrop what humans ought do is to trod along the path of rectitude and righteousness.

6. God had not made a general decision that so and so should inherit heaven and such and such a person should fall into hell.

- Ref:* (a) Mic. 6:3, 4. My people, have I wronged you, in any way at all? Please tell me. I rescued you from Egypt where you were slaves. I sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to be your leaders. (L.B.)
- (b) Is. 5:3, 4. Listen, people of Jerusalem and Judah! You be the Judge for me and my vineyard; what more could I have done for my vineyard? I hoped for sweet grapes, but bitter grapes were all that grew. (L.B.)
- (c) Rom. 2:4, 5, 6. Or perhaps you despise his great kindness, tolerance, patience. Surely you know that God is kind because he is trying to lead you to repent. But you have a hardened stubborn heart and so you are making your own punishment... (G.N.B.)
- (d) Rom. 11:20-22... They were broken off because they did not believe, while you remain in place because you do believe. But do not be proud of it; instead, be afraid, God did not spare the Jews who are like natural branches; do you think he will spare you? Here we see how kind and how severe God is. He is severe towards those who have fallen but kind to you; if you continue in his kindness. But if you do not you too will be broken off. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

It is repeated that God does not act arbitrarily as to make one person inherit the bliss of heaven and another the torments of hell. Fatalism, is thus declared to be unacceptable to the S.O.C.



7. It does not mean that God does not possess the right or power to earmark and purify some people whom he knows before hand by his foreknowledge, for employing them in his work.

*Ref:* (a) Rom. 9:21. After all, the man who makes the pots has the right to use the clay as he wishes and to make two pots from the same lump of clay one for special occasions and the other for ordinary use. (G.N.B.)

(b) Jer. 1:5. "I chose you before I gave you life and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations." (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

This is an argument based on the inexplicable divine handling of humans. Accordingly, it is stated that God by His foreknowledge chooses or selects certain person or persons for His errands. The Old Testament has a number of such cases. The selections of Abraham, the ancient Patriarch, Moses, the first prophet of Israel, Samuel, the subsequent prophet are a few examples. The case of prophet Jeremiah is another typical one. For, the Lord selected him while he was in his mother's womb. The selection of the disciples by Jesus to make them 'fishers of men' is a classical example from the New Testament.

8. Nor does it imply that God had not separated and glorified those who according to his unchanging precognition were known to him and were found eligible for his calling.

*Ref:* (a) Rom. 8:29, 30. Those whom God had already chosen, he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many brothers. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

God glorifies whom He pleases. He has valid reasons for that. Man is not to murmur over it. The pinpointed answer on this issue is the one given by the Lord to the ancient prophet *Jona*. What St. Thomas A Kempis says, while dilating upon the divine dispensation, or God's justice shall be our loadstar

or directive principle. In his magnum opus '*On the Imitation of Christ*, he wrote to the following effect: when you see a person endowed with faith and another bereft of faith, do not debate or dispute. It all comes out of the unfathomable wisdom of the Lord. Therefore He exhorts us to sing with the prophet *David* '*Thou art righteousness itself O! Lord; Thy commandments are always righteous.*'

9. Further it does not signify that God, out of his dispensation created and decreed some to be in such situation that they become evil-mongers so as to be punished; or that some others were created and destined to be so good as to deserve salvation. It also does not imply that freedom of decision was denied to man and hence they were forced to perform good and evil as was determined by He Himself and subjected them to reward and punishment. But the theory put forward by certain people that whatever man does is done so, because he was made to do so by God's, pre-determination and so such actions would not be the causes either for punishment or salvation and that salvation and punishment are accorded to men by the pre-determination of God; hence this theory may cause to generate the evil thought that everything happens only according to God's will and it will lead to dangers like monotony and depression besides perpetration of evil action and thus projecting a just God into an unjust one.

- Ref:
- (a) Rom. 2:11. For God judges everyone by the same standard. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Ps. 19:9, 10... The judgements of the Lord are just; they are always fair they are more desirable than the finest gold; they are sweeter than the purest honey. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) 1Pet. 1:17. You call him Father, when you pray to God, who judges all people by the same standard; so then, spend the rest of your life here on earth in reverence of him. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) 1Pet. 2:3. As the scripture says, "you have found out for yourselves how kind the Lord is. (G.N.B.)

- (e) 2Chro. 19:7. Honour the Lord and act carefully because the Lord our God does not tolerate fraud or partiality or the taking of bribes. (G.N.B.)

*Comment*

The stand of the S.O.C. against pre-determination is stated once again. Under no circumstances can humans put forward the plea that, they do good or bad as per the dictates of God. That argument is a travesty of truth and a crafty device to shirk off the onus of actions.



Theme No: 33

## On the Books of the Bible

### *Introduction*

Every faithful should acknowledge the Old Testament and New Testament Books, which were authored through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and canonised by the holy Fathers.

### *Comment*

The S.O.C. holds that, the various books of the Bible are inspired writings. Nevertheless a gradation and categorisation is effected into canonical and Deutro-canonical books. While the former group reveals salvation history in its unfolding, the latter group in general, helps in the efficient performance of the Ecclesia and the faithful. In this context, the S.O.C. opines that, treatises, commentaries etc. authored by the celebrated ecclesiasts and approved by the Church can also be deemed as authoritative texts and can be used in the Church.

### **Canonised Books of the Old Testament**

Books of Moses - 5  
Joshua, son of Nun - 1  
Judges - 1  
Ruth - 1  
Samuel - 2  
Kings - 2  
Chronicles - 2  
Ezra including Nehemiah - 1  
Maccabees - 3  
Job - 1  
Books of 150 Psalms - 1  
Books of Solomon - 4  
Prophets - 16

In the above list four books are attributed to Solomon as it includes the two books of Proverbs; there is a title at the beginning of the 25th Chapter of the Book of Proverbs, the chapters following the caption are to be deemed as constituting another book. Daniel's book includes the Book of Susanna also.

### **Canonised Books of the New Testament**

Gospels - 4

Paul's Epistles - 14

Peter's Epistles - 2

John's Epistles - 3

James - 1

Jude - 1

Clement's Epistles - 2

Acts of the Apostles - 1

Regarding some of the Books incorporated in the Old and New Testaments, the following is to be borne in mind. Although the Church respectfully considers them as canonical texts, Athanasius the Great, Dionysius of Alexandria, et. al. cast doubts on the authenticity of them, while some suggested that a few others of that category may be studied and read to augment faith and devotion. Such books are listed under.

Solomon's Great Wisdom

Bar Asira

Judith

Tobith

Didascalia of the Apostles

Shepherd of Hermas

Revelation of John

Revelation of Paul the Disciple

Epistles of Barnabas

As all the Books are written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they are useful for giving counselling, imparting instruction, confirming in orthodoxy and training in morals. Treatises which are likely to be so written can be approved of by the Church. Similarly canons, histories, preachings, epistles, homilies, can be recognised, after careful scrutiny by the bishops.



## Theme No: 34

# On Synods and the Magisterium of the Church

### *Introduction*

On the days following the death of our Lord and his disciples, pagan kings and lords used to persecute the Christian Church.

1. The devout, however, adhered to their ways of faith without abandoning orthodoxy. But, once the persecution was over, and the Church began to experience times of peace, many heretics teacher arose from within the Church, began to interpret Biblical verses to their liking and propagate heterodoxical doctrines against the true import of the teachings of Apostles. This caused the convening by the Christian rulers, of the General Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. There, the heretics were excommunicated from the Church, Orthodoxy reconfirmed and rules cum regulations formulated for its preservation.

- Ref:*
- (a) Acts. 20:29, 30. I know, that after I leave, fierce wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock. The time will come when some men from your own group will tell lies to lead the believers away after them. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Mt. 24: 4, 5 Jesus answered, "Be on your guard, and do not let anyone deceive you; many men, claiming to speak for me will come and say, "I am the Messiah! And they will deceive many people." (G.N.B.)
  - (c) Col. 2:8. See to it, then that no one enslaves you by means of the worthless deceit of human wisdom, which comes from the things handed down by men and from the ruling spirits of the universe and not from Christ. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) 2Jn. 10:11. So then, if someone comes to you, who does not bring this teaching, do not welcome him in your homes; do not even say, "Peace be with you;"

for anyone who wishes him peace becomes his partner in the evil things he does. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The circumstances that led to the convening of the three ecumenical councils are explained. Further the outcomes of these councils are also described in general.

2. No one has the right or authority to accept or preach any theory that contravenes the faith formulated by those General Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

*Ref:* (a) Gal. 1:8, 9. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel that is different from the one we preached to you, may he be condemned to hell. (G.N.B.)

(b) Prov. 22:28. Never move an old boundary mark that your ancestors established. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The affirmation that the S.O.C. acknowledges only the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus, of 325,352,381 C.E. respectively. It may be noted that the Byzantine Church recognises seven councils. In other words this Church accepts the four subsequent Councils also. They are those of Chalcedon, Constantinople II, Constantinople III, and Nicaea II, held in 451,553,680, and 787 C.E. respectively. For the Roman Church, however, fourteen further councils are treated as ecumenical ones.

3. But regulations, observances and conventions which are in agreement with the orthodox teachings cum ways of thinking can be enunciated from time to time as necessitated by the times and climes, by the ecumenical synods consisting of the bishops, priests, et. al. of the Catholic and Apostolic Church. As the ceremonies in the holy sacraments like Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Matrimony and ceremonials related to Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter Day and Day of Pentecost etc. are in perfect accordance with orthodox faith of the Church, and

recognised by the accepted missals and rubrics of the Church, no body, can on his own volition alter them.

- Ref:*
- (a) Acts. 16:4. As they went through the towns, they delivered to the believers the rules decided upon by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and told them to obey those rules. (G.N.B.)
  - (b) Rom. 14:19. So then we must always aim at those things that bring peace and that help to strengthen one another. (G.N.B.)
  - (c) 1Cor. 8:12. So then, if food makes my brother sin, I will never eat meat again so as not to make my brother fall into sin. (G.N.B.)
  - (d) Tit. 1:5. I left you in Crete, so that you could put in order the things that still needed doing and appoint Church elders in every town. Remember my instructions.

### *Comment*

The magisterium or the authority of the Church to convene ecumenical Councils in future is enunciated. Reckoning the signs of the times, such Councils must be called forth lest the Church remains stagnant and obscurantist in approach. A direction, however, is given as to which all subjects are not to be altered or amended.

4. The Church and her authorities have the right to expel and anathematise those who are seen to be the detractors of the orthodox faith, who are found to be mischief-mongers, who do not observe the tenets and teachings of the Church and who lead diabolic ways of life. Those who are so anathematised are to be treated as alienated ones until they truly repent and are taken back into the fold of the Church.

- Ref:*
- (a) 1Cor. 5:4, 5. I have in the name of our Lord Jesus already passed Judgements on the man who has done these terrible things... You are to hand this man over to Satan for his body to be destroyed so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord. (G.N.B.)



- (b) Mt. 18:13. When he finds it, I tell you, he feels far happier over this one sheep than over the ninety nine that did not get lost. (G.N.B.)
- (c) 2Cor. 2: 6, 7, 8. It is enough that this person has been punished in this way by most of you. Now, however, you should forgive him and encourage him in order to keep him from becoming so sad as to give up completely. And so I beg you to let him know that you really do love him. (G.N.B.)

### *Comment*

The proclamation, that the magisterium has in it not only the dogmatic and doctrinal power over the Church, but also the regulatory and disciplinary authority concerning the Ecclesia, is spelt here.

## Appendix

### Names of the Heretics who rose up in the Church in the Past and the Summary of their teachings

1. **Simon the Sorcerer:-** Through the art of sorcery he taught that God is seen as Father by the Jews, Son by the Samarites and Holy Spirit by the Gentiles.
2. **Manthros:-** He was a disciple of Simon the Sorcerer. He proclaimed that those who received baptism by him would become greater than the angels.
3. **Sutrininous:-** He taught as follows. The world was created by seven angels. It was to them that God said, "Now we will make humans and they will be like us and resemble us." The Law was decreed by the angels. Marriage is from the Devil. As devils help the evil doers so does the redeemer come to help men.
4. **Basildos:-** He was the one who initiated the heresy of the snake worshippers called Gausalists. He openly taught that as there are 365 days in an year, so is the number of skies; he further taught that we should satisfy our sexual desires.
5. **Abiyoona:-** He taught that the beginning of Jesus is from Mary and Joseph.
6. **Kurianthos:-** He taught as follows. After resurrection from our graves we will live a thousand years in the worldly Jerusalem fulfilling our sensual pleasures; the world was created by the angels, Christ was born in the human way.
7. **Mlithinos:-** He taught that our Lord brought his physical body from the sky and he entered the Virgin as in a bottle of rose water.

8. **Kurdoon:-** He taught that there are myriads of original beings and that there is no resurrection.
9. **Markose:-** He created awe among many by his ability to speak Hebrew much better than many others could. He deceived many people by assuming different names.
10. **Marcion:-** According to him there are three original beings. They are the Good, the Just, and the Corporeal Evil. The Just created everything from inert matter. It was he who gave the Old Testament to mankind. But in order to redeem those who were in the bondage of the Just, Jesus the Son of the Good descended. Without becoming a human being or suffering passion in actuality he moved about as an apparition. The giver of the New Testament also was the Just - There is no resurrection and judgement. He accepted as authentic only the Gospel of Luke and the books of the prophets.
11. **Tatian of Beth Nahrain:-** Marriage is adultery. He put the four gospels together and compiled a gospel named Diatessaron. He deleted the genealogy of Christ and everything that showed that Jesus was from the seed of David. He confused the Apostles and the disciples. Those who joined his heresy are called Tatians.
12. **Muntos:-** He claimed himself to be the Paraclete. He had two wives. Prascala and Macsamala. They were said to be prophetesses. The two cities Papos of Asia and Timon were given the name Jerusalem. It was there that he taught his heretical doctrines. He committed suicide.
13. **Bardaisan:-** The following is the summary of his teachings. Fire, water, light and air are the primordial elements; gods and the worlds originated from them. It was an arch-angel and not God who spoke to Moses and the prophets. Mary gave birth to a being who was a mortal and could die; it was rather a luminous soul with the form of a mortal man. Men were created by angels while the seasons were created by the planets. Christ was born under the influence of Jupiter and was crucified under the influence of Mars. Further it was under the influence of Jupiter



that he was resurrected. There is no resurrection for human beings. Marriage provides purity.

14. **Evriganis:-** He was sceptical about Trinity as he did not have faith in it. He taught that there was no resurrection for human beings. He was an accomplished speaker and excellent preacher. He wrote many commentaries on the Old Testament.
15. **Halksanar:-** He taught that even if one gives up Christ orally, one will be without error if Christ is acknowledged in heart. He produced a book for his followers. Those who listened to his readings will have remission of sins.
16. **Navathis:-** Those who committed sins after getting themselves baptised will not get forgiveness of sins. It is said that he abandoned Christ during the persecution caused by Duchions in C.E. 561.
17. **Sabellios:-** He taught that the Holy Trinity implies only one and the same person. This person was known as the Father in the Old Testament, the Son who put on a human body in the New Testament and the Holy Spirit who spoke through the Apostles.
18. **Euvavathis of Egypt:-** He preached Jewish customs. Besides, he taught that the good ones will have enough food and drink on the earth for a millennium.
19. **Paul of Smasathaya:-** Christ was an ordinary man. He became eligible for divine grace. The origin of Christ is from Mary. Seven beautiful women along with him sang praises to his own name. He did not deem adultery to be impure.
20. **Mani:-** He called himself Christ and the Holy Spirit. A good God and an evil one were the two primordial beings. The sun and the moon are the ships that convey the human souls and the good actions of the humans consolidated in the form of material bodies to the place of light; in the end, the good God will consign to the flames all matter and all souls who do not believe in Manichean philosophy. Marriage comes from the devil. Although at the time of death the souls depart from the human body there

is no resurrection for human souls. Our Lord did not have soul and body in reality. What was seen of him as doing ministry and suffering passion were mere fantasies. There are 25 gods and they have 12 women.

21. **Arius:-** The Son of God is a created being. God the Father created the Son before every other creation and caused the Son to undertake all other creation. Therefore the Son is not co-equal with God. The body that the Son put on was devoid of soul. Instead of the soul there was the divinity in him. He changed the accepted trisagion as, Glory to the Father, through the Son by the Holy Spirit. But, he, however did not change the baptismal formula that one is baptised in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as he felt that by such a change he would be exposed.
22. **Navadis:-** This unholy man produced 94 books of revelations and acts. He then taught the following. There is a Father and a Mother for all the living beings. There are many sons for them. Many souls and gods exist. Angels were created by an arch-angel. Even God is subject to destiny. Therefore, as is the lot of everything and every being God also would go out of existence. It was God who crucified Christ. Christ is a Creation even though His body was ethereal; without actually being crucified or resurrected, He caused himself to have undergone them. Sin is a natural affair. Our bodies are from the devil. There is no resurrection. Marriage is unclean.
23. **Macedonius:-** Although the Son is equal to the Father the Holy Spirit is not so, he taught.
24. **Eunomius:-** God created the Son before every other creation. The Son created the Holy Spirit before bringing forth every other creation. This heretic amended the trinitarian baptismal formula and baptised the candidates in the name of Jesus only. For him only that portion of the human body upto the breast alone was clean and so he baptised only that portion and left out the remaining portion as unclean. He had no qualms of



conscience to teach that none of the mysterious ways of God is concealed to him and that as he knew himself, he knew all the divine ways.

25. **Narius:-** The following is the summary of his heretical teaching. Although Trinity is One in nature, he attributed degrees of status to the persons of Trinity. He coined words to articulate this. Thus he called the Father Great, Son to be the Greatest and the Holy Spirit Very Great. Eventhough the Word became flesh the soul that he assumed was similar to vegetable or animal soul and not a perfect one. Jesus did not possess consciousness; instead he had divinity. The body of Jesus was of ethereal type. His nature was a mixed one. Even after the resurrection of human beings they are confounded with the wants of eating and drinking. He authored one thousand Psalms and claimed them to be superior to those of David. It is gathered from some texts that as regards the incarnation of the Son, he followed the theory put forward by Sabellias.
26. **Eusebius of Urahah:-** He had certain old disciples who used to propagate that dreams as well as the activities of the evil spirits are actually the revealings of Holy Spirit. So naturally those who approach them would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Even if such people sleep with women they would not have any blemish; the body that we bear will bring no good.
27. **Eutuchus:-** He seems to have followed Ulithinose and Apollinarius. Word the God did not take anything human from the Virgin. Instead the Word by itself became flesh. His body was not of our nature. His nature, rather, was a mixed one. It was interchangeable too.
28. **Julius of Haggag:-** On account of the mixing of natures, the body of our Lord got transformed into one of divine substance. So he was not of our nature. What all did he perform during his earthly ministry as well as his crucifixion and resurrection were all illusions.



29. **Tritheists:-** This school of thinkers propagated the following. Trinity is not of three persons with one nature. Each one of the persons of Trinity has rather separate and independent natures. So Trinity was constituted of three Persons of three natures. Therefore they may be called three deities. Hence the name Tritheists.
30. **Stephen the Son of Sodayli:-** His teachings were as follows. There is no eternal punishment as there is an end to every punishment. Therefore the sinners “will not be punished forever”. Similarly mercy will be shown even to the devils. In the end everything will return to God’s nature. In order to gain authenticity for his teachings he authored a book and to create the impression that it was by Hierothios the preceptor of St. Dionysius, he named it after Hierothios.

All the above heresies entertain tenets which contravene the essential doctrines of the Church. In the beginning of these heresies they all gained some strength and many people rallied around them. But God has uprooted them all so that none of them is to be seen today. Nestorians, the Greeks and the Church of England, uphold the variables of the heresies of the above type. With regard to the mixing up of the human and the divine natures in Christ and with regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit, these Churches follow various other heresies as well. Some declare that the mixing up of the natures in Christ is volitional and behavioural. For some others, the joining of natures is on the personal level; while for some it was only an apparent one as in the case of putting a different countenance or face with the help of a mask, which is known ‘persupa’ in Greek terminology. Some others opine that His godliness and manliness, though inseparably mixed must be treated so differently and must be known, as of two natures. There are some who propagate the double procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son.

Egyptian, Ethiopian and the Armenian Churches, however, agree with the teachings of the Jacobite Syrians.



# Quintessence of Religious Doctrines



Mor Dionysius Geevarghese  
Vattasseril

*Mathopadesa Sarangal* written by Mor Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril is a comprehensive and summarised formulation of the essence of Syrian Orthodox theology based on the works of the Church Fathers like Mor Gregorios Bar Ebroyo. This great work was prepared and published by the author while he was the Malankara Malpan of the undivided Malankara Church.

Until 1964, this book was reprinted in its unaltered form. It is our earnest effort to make this book available in its original form translated into English by a well known scholar, Prof. O. M. Mathew Oruvattithara. He has translated the original work with much precision and originality. Also, he has appended to each theme a commentary to explain the content and the original formulation of the author. Prof. Mathew has done a commendable work in his perfect translation as well as his enriching commentary. This book will undoubtedly be a valuable resource material for all scholars and students of the faith and doctrines of the Syrian Orthodox Church.



Prof. O. M. Mathew



Publishers

Mor Adai Study Centre  
Cheeranchira, Changanaserry- 686 106

[SOCMNet.org](http://SOCMNet.org)